

52ND ANNUAL MHSAA FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT

2026 Rules and Regulations for 11-Player

INTRODUCTION

The 52nd Annual MHSAA 11-Player Football Playoff Series will be played Oct. 30 or 31 - District Semi-Finals, Nov. 6 or 7 - District Final, Nov. 13 or 14 - Regional, Nov. 21 - Semifinals (for any Semifinals played at NMU Nov. 20) - and Finals Nov. 27 or 28. It is the responsibility of each competing school to be familiar with the rules and regulations that follow. The Representative Council has attempted to set up financial allowances for competing team expenses and for schools hosting playoff games. It should be kept in mind that participation in MHSAA tournaments is voluntary and that the total expenses of teams are not guaranteed. Cooperation of all schools will assure an equitable return of funds to both entertaining and competing schools and will enable the MHSAA to continue services to member schools and promote meets and tournaments in all sports.

11-PLAYER SCORING SYSTEM

Playoff points are earned as follows and are figured only based on games played:

60 points if you defeat a Division 1 team;	55 points if you defeat a Division 2 team;
50 points if you defeat a Division 3 team;	45 points if you defeat a Division 4 team;
40 points if you defeat a Division 5 team;	35 points if you defeat a Division 6 team;
30 points if you defeat a Division 7 team;	25 points if you defeat a Division 8 team;

All varsity football games involving MHSAA member schools must result in a win or loss.

Varsity games ending regulation play in a tie score must be decided by the MHSAA-approved overtime procedures.

Subvarsity games will **not use** the tie-breaking procedure.

Bonus points are earned as follows and are figured only based on games played:

The multiplier changes depending on the size of each opponent.

Division 1 = 6 points	Division 2 = 6 points	Division 3 = 5 points	Division 4 = 5 points
Division 5 = 4 points	Division 6 = 4 points	Division 7 = 3 points	Division 8 = 3 points

- Add the playoff points and write as a fraction. The sum of the playoff points is the numerator and the number of games played is the denominator. Add the bonus points for each opponent separately and write as a fraction. The bonus points of the opposing team are the numerator, and the number of games played by that opponent is the denominator. Then add these two fractions for a total. (After adding the fractions, adjust a decimal number to the nearest thousandth (92.8888 will become 92.889) to determine the playoff average.)
- Forfeiting schools will not receive bonus points for the contest(s) for which they forfeit. Also, the enrollment cap for Division 8 football is now 250 students or fewer.
- Varsity games only are to be counted. Non-varsity games are not recorded.
- Schools may opt up to a higher division with justification in writing prior to the 5/1 deadline. Enrollment figures for schools opting to play in a higher classification will be set at the median enrollment for the higher classification.
- Out-of-state opponents are classified based on Michigan classification. Only the first **nine games** of an out-of-state opponent's schedule played prior to the selection of District qualifiers will be included in the strength of schedule playoff point calculation.
- The number of points a team scores against an opponent has no bearing on the playoff point system.
- **MHSAA Handbook policies on inclement weather (lightning and tornado specifically) shall be followed. The game resumption delays may be extended by host schools as a tournament policy superseding the game time and delay schedules used for the regular season.** Regular-season games canceled because of acts of God or emergency closing of facilities will not be counted unless they are rescheduled and played before Sunday, Oct. 25, 2026. All games contracted or mutually agreed to before Sept. 10, 2026, and played before Oct. 25, 2026 will count toward the playoffs, even though the game may not have been reported to the MHSAA.
- **Games arranged/contracted after Sept. 10 may count toward playoff points if the agreement to play is the result of game cancellations by previously contracted opponents for reasons of health or lack of available players and subject to MHSAA approval.**
- Students who transfer from one school to another and are eligible immediately under one or more of the exceptions to the transfer rule and eligible under all other regulations are eligible for MHSAA tournaments only if they are enrolled in the new school (actual attendance in one or more classes and on the official records of the school) prior to Oct. 1 (fall sports). Eligibility lists shall be treated the same as during the regular season as in Regulation II, Section 4.
- Games forfeited for reasons including but not limited to:
 - Use of an ineligible player.
 - Refusal to play for any reason will be recorded as a win for the aggrieved school and a loss for the offending school. All playoff and bonus points will be awarded even if the game was not played.
 - If a member school forfeits a varsity football contest and it is alleged by the opposing school that the forfeit is for reasons other than health or risk issues or other compelling circumstances but rather to avoid competition, the forfeiting school principal, athletic director, and head coach must appear before the Executive Committee to show cause why other sanctions should not be applied to the forfeiting school.
- Prearranged league games will be figured into the computations if designated prior to Oct. 1. Games played after Saturday, Oct. 24, 2026, will not be figured into the 2026 playoff computations. Leagues and conferences engaged in crossover matchups must submit to the MHSAA office prior to the start of the regular season the exact method of matching teams in crossover games.
- Schools may play the same opponent more than once during the season and receive separate playoff and bonus point totals for each game.

- Schools are responsible for reporting weekly scores to the MHSAA.** Also, schools are responsible for knowing their playoff total and average score. If a discrepancy occurs, the MHSAA is to be notified by the aggrieved school before 4:30 p.m. on the Thursday of that week.
- After the first week of competition, football averages, as determined by MHSAA systems, will be released not later than each Wednesday. It is the intention of the MHSAA to publish the names of schools in a position to qualify for the playoffs by their team record and/or playoff average. School enrollments and the number of scheduled games will be included in the report.
- Once qualifying teams are publicized on Selection Sunday (Oct. 25, 2026), if it is discovered that a qualifying team used an ineligible player during the regular season and the forfeiture of that game(s) would have caused that qualifying team not to qualify, that team will be withdrawn from the playoffs, but no team will replace it. That team's scheduled District Semifinal opponent will receive a 'bye' and advance in the bracket. If it is discovered that a non-qualifying team used an ineligible player, no changes will be made to qualifying teams, their seeding, or home and away designations.
- 11-Player games will count only for 11-player playoff points. 8-Player games will count only in 8-player playoff points.

REPORTING PROCEDURE

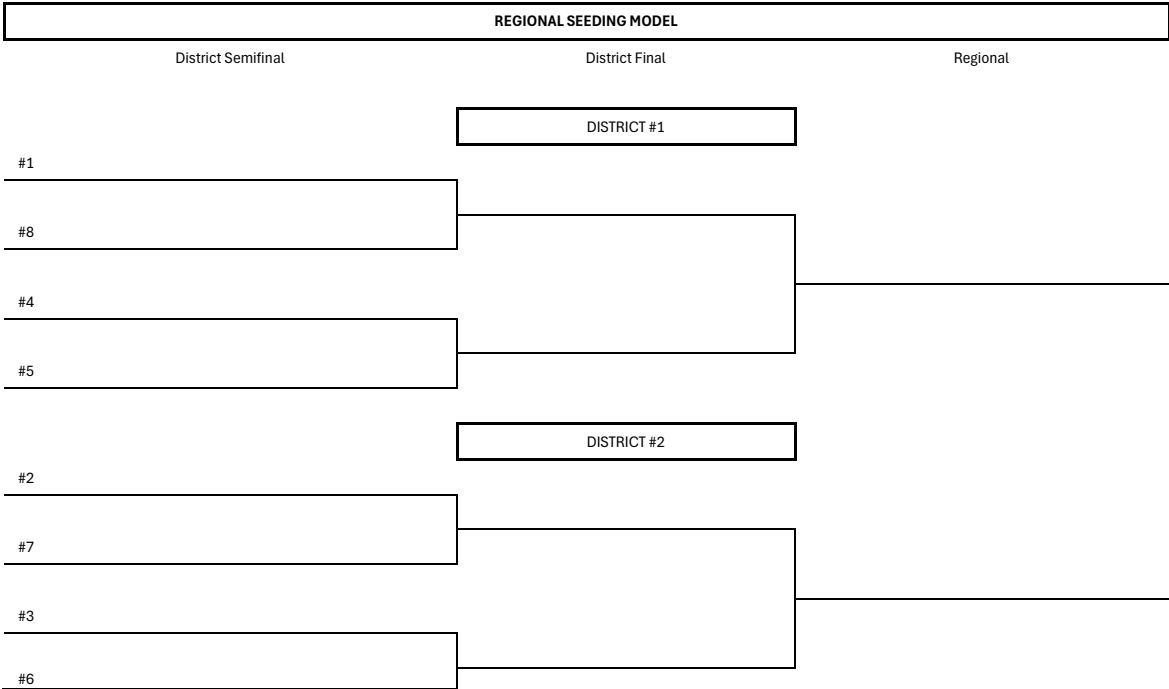
Each home team is responsible for entering its win/loss on the MHSAA website within one hour after the game.

11-PLAYER SELECTION PROCESS

There will be 256 teams selected to participate in a five-week playoff in 8 separate divisions. A minimum of **seven** 11-player games must be played to be declared a qualifier. The top 32 teams, based on playoff points from each division, will qualify for the football post-season. NO AUTOMATIC QUALIFIERS.

DISTRICT PAIRINGS and GAME HOSTS

- On "Selection Sunday," each division of 32 schools will be divided into four geographic regions, each with eight schools. Each of the four regions will be divided into two Districts, each with four schools.
- Beginning in 2026, District pairings will be decided by playoff points earned by all eight schools in the Regional: District 1: 1 vs 8, 4 vs 5; District 2: 2 vs 7, 3 vs 6. An example District/ Regional bracket is listed below.



- If two or more qualifying teams finish with identical point averages within a Regional or while determining playoff pairings, the tie will be broken as follows:
 - If the tied teams played each other, the winner would receive the higher ranking.
 - If a tie still exists, the wins of your opponents will be totaled and divided by the total games played and the higher percentage will be selected for the higher ranking.
 - If a tie still exists, the team will be selected by a coin toss conducted by the MHSAA staff in the East Lansing office.
 - If a three-way tie exists, the MHSAA staff will determine the method for breaking the tie.
- Changes in home and away designations and opponents within a District Semifinal may be made no later than 10 a.m. Monday, Oct. 26, 2026, if they are the result of an MHSAA clerical error. Games may be played on Friday at 7 p.m. or 7:30 p.m., Saturday at 1 p.m., 7 p.m. or 7:30 p.m., unless teams mutually agree to a different time.
- In the second week of playoffs, the District Semifinal winner with the higher playoff average will host the District championship game.
- When the distance between competing schools is within 75 miles, the host school will determine the day, site, and time of the game. If the distance between schools is over 75 miles, both schools must agree on a date and time. If agreement is not reached, the game must be played on Saturday afternoon.

- Schools listed as being on a probationary status with no hosting or reimbursement privileges may not host any level of competition and will not receive any share of competition receipts or reimbursement for participation.
- Political signage of any kind is prohibited inside or outside of any MHSAA tournament event.

REGIONAL GAME HOSTS

Regional championship games will be hosted by the District winner with the highest regular-season playoff average. If both teams have the same average, the tie will be broken by the published tiebreaker procedure. Game times will be determined on the same basis as District Semifinal and District Final games.

GENERAL REGULATIONS

Forfeitures – The MHSAA must be notified in writing as soon as a forfeiture is known but no later than 24 hours after the occurrence. Written notification should include game details and full explanation of forfeiture. The forfeiting school has the primary obligation of notification.

Overtime -The 10-yard line overtime rule outlined in the Football Rule Book will be in effect for all varsity, regular season, and playoff games.

Point Differential - The Point Differential Rule will be in effect during regular season and playoffs.

Practice - There is to be no practice on game fields the week prior to District Semifinal, District Final, Regional, Semifinal and Final games (unless approved by the MHSAA). Host schools are exempt from this regulation. Qualifiers may not practice in Ford Field once the playoff teams have been determined.

Roster - A maximum of seven (7) school coaches and four (4) managers/statisticians will be permitted in the team boxes during all playoff games. All persons not in uniform and on the sideline must have a pass. Head coaches must be mindful of sideline control issues that will be officiated to the spirit and letter of the rule. All substitutes must be in the same color and design legal uniform.

Cheerleaders -- A maximum of 12 cheerleaders in uniform, including mascots, will be admitted, and a maximum of 12 may lead cheers from the field. Schools with more than 12 varsity cheerleaders during the regular season may include those cheerleaders during the playoffs, but sub-varsity cheerleaders may not be brought up for the postseason games. Cheer squads shall follow either the MHSAA Cheerleading Guidelines or the guidelines approved by their local school district for regular cheerleading, whichever is more restrictive & limiting. Local school districts are RESPONSIBLE for enforcing restrictions that are more limiting than the MHSAA guidelines. All cheer squads shall adhere to all guidelines provided by the tournament manager. Representative Council action in May of 2004 prohibits tunnels for players by spectators, bands, or others (but permitted for cheerleaders) at any location and any level of MHSAA tournament play.

Athletic Trainer - Schools should furnish their own athletic trainer. The host manager, however, is required to have medical personnel on duty and to secure emergency ambulance service if possible. Schools are to notify the MHSAA if they do not have a physician for the Final game.

50/50 RAFFLE - MHSAA tournament hosts can conduct 50/50 raffles provided the host site manager requests and receives the appropriate license from the State of Michigan. [Charitable Gaming Raffle License](#)

Merchandise - Merchandise sold at playoff sites must be from an approved MHSAA vendor. Political signage of any kind is prohibited inside or outside of any MHSAA tournament event.

YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

During the MHSAA Tournament events, the MHSAA expects all designated managers, volunteer or paid staff assisting in the event, officials, or any other personnel to follow local school district policy and state statute regarding the mandatory reporting of child abuse, bullying, hazing and sexual harassment. A report of such activity shall be made to legal authorities and to the MHSAA Executive Director or his designee.

IMAGE TAKING DEVICES in LOCKER ROOM

Using devices of any kind to capture or transmit images is strictly prohibited in locker rooms, dressing areas, training rooms, weigh-in rooms, showers, restrooms, or other areas where there is an expectation of privacy during MHSAA tournament events. Tournament managers or athletic directors that discover such use should move immediately to have the device removed and inform the head coach or athletic director of the identity and nature of the activity of the person involved.

TOURNAMENT GAME BALL

Each competing school will present (3) NFHS legal and MHSAA approved game balls of its choice from those listed in the Wilson product line. Each tournament qualifying team will receive one complimentary Wilson football. The Representative Council has affirmed that all games of the MHSAA Football Playoffs will use any of the models of the Wilson Footballs that are consistent with National Federation Football Specifications. If one of the participating schools does not provide appropriate game balls those schools will use one of the approved Wilson models provided by the opposing school. If the school refuses to use the opposing team ball the game will be forfeited.

TOBACCO and ALCOHOL POLICY

Use of alcohol or tobacco, including e-cigarettes or other smoking devices, is prohibited at MHSAA tournament events by players, coaches and spectators. Managers should stress in coaches' meetings that they are not to use tobacco at the tournament venue.

GAME TIME

Semifinal Games -- The games will be played Saturday, Nov. 21, 2026 at 1 p.m. At sites where two games are scheduled, game times will be 11:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m., with separate admissions for each game. If local conditions allow, game management may schedule consecutive games with one admission of \$9. Semifinal games may be televised live as selected by the MHSAA and the TV production company. These games will be played on Saturday night, Nov. 21, 2026, with game time to be determined. Semifinal games scheduled for the Superior Dome in Marquette may be played on either Friday night or on Saturday morning/afternoon as necessary.

Final Games -- All Final games will be played at Ford Field on two separate days, **Friday 11/27 and Saturday 11/28**. Times and division assignments are TBD.

UNIFORMS

For all rounds of the 11-player tournament, the team with the higher playoff average will be considered the home team and wear dark colored jerseys; visiting teams are to wear white colored jersey. (Dark and White jersey colors may be switched if mutually agreed upon by the two competing teams.)

PREGAME – PUBLIC ADDRESS ANNOUNCER and TIMERS

The host District Semifinals, District Finals, Regional, Semifinal, and Final management will select the P.A. announcers and timers. Pregame clock starts at least 20 minutes before kickoff. Clock should be set so time is at 0:00 five minutes prior to kick off time. (For example: 7pm game time, place 55 minutes on clock at 6:00pm – clock will be at 0:00 at 6:55pm anthem start. Coin toss at 20-minute mark. Team Introductions at 4-minute mark: (teams not required to be on the field). Playing of the National Anthem with 0:00 on clock, (Bands either in the stands or in either end zone, no further than the 25-yard line). Kick off immediately after the National Anthem observance. **Note: Teams are required to be on the field and on respective side lines for the playing of the national Anthem**

PRE-GAME and HALFTIME ENTERTAINMENT for all PLAYOFF GAMES

Participation by school bands is optional. If the participating schools do not have a band, the MHSAA will determine the pre-game and halftime entertainment at the Finals. Representative Council action in May of 2004 prohibits tunnels for players by spectators, bands or others (but permitted for cheerleaders) at any location and any level of MHSAA tournament play. Representative Council action in May of 2007 requires the following policy: Bands may play during the pregame, any dead ball, halftime and after the game, and bands may play from the official's dead ball whistle until players break the huddle for traditional huddle offenses or to the official's whistle for ready to play when non-traditional, no-huddle offenses are used. Bands will play either from the stands or in either end zone, no further than the 25-yard line. The following will prevail if both bands desire to participate:

Pre-game -- Bands from schools designated "home" teams may play the National Anthem. If they prefer not to play, the "visiting" team band may play.

Halftime -- Bands from schools designated "visitors" may perform the first seven (7) minutes of the half. The "home team" band may perform the second seven (7) minutes of the half. Time allotted includes entering and leaving the field. Bands must be off the field at least three minutes before the start of the second half. Schools may use pompon routines, choral or other school groups if they wish, but the maximum time allotted for their school is seven minutes. Local management is not to be expected to furnish risers, backdrops, etc. If a school chooses not to perform, the opposing school may use their allotted time (not to exceed 14 minutes). If a specific announcer is required for the halftime show, arrangements must be made the preceding week with managers of District Semifinal, District Final, Regional, and Semifinal game sites. Schools competing in the Finals must make arrangements with the MHSAA office.

TROPHIES and MEDALS

Districts and Regionals -- A trophy will be awarded to the winning team at each District and Regional Playoff game. In addition, 50 medals will be awarded to each winning team. For those teams with more than 50 players additional medals may be purchased through the MHSAA office at the competing team's expense.

Finals -- Trophies will be awarded to the winner and runner-up schools in each division after the Final game; 50 medals will be awarded to each winning and runner-up team in each division. For those teams with more than 50 players, additional medals may be purchased through the MHSAA office at the competing team's expense. Members of the MHSAA Representative Council will make post-game award presentations.

OFFICIALS

The Football Officials Assignment Committee will assign officials to all football playoff games. Officials selected to work District Semifinal and District Final games will receive \$110 per game. Regional game officials will be paid \$110 per game. Semifinal officials will receive \$125 and Final game officials will receive \$125 per game.

Mileage -- District Semifinal, District Final, Regional and Semifinal officials will receive mileage more than 50 miles will be paid at the rate of \$.40 cents per mile round trip starting with the 51st mile.

Coin Toss -- At 20 minutes prior to game time, the officials will call team captains together for the coin toss. Visiting team captain will call first.

Chain Crew -- The home management is to select a **four**-person chain crew. The fourth person is to manage the spot of the ball and the placement of the clips for on-field measurements. It is recommended that registered officials should work the yardage chains; however, local management may use their home crew if they have been regulars in that capacity. If possible, the crew is to be in full officials' uniform and will be reimbursed \$15 per individual, per game (no mileage). Officials are not to be involved with any microphone hook-ups, TV or radio interviews -- no exceptions.

Timeouts -- All timeouts are not to be less than 70 seconds in length. This includes breaks between quarters and after scoring plays.

MEDIA

For information on credentials, drones, locker room privacy policy, microphones, photographers, flash photography, postgame interviews, press box, results, streaming (audio and video), and videotaping, go to this [Media/Streaming Information PDF](#).

DISTRICT SEMIFINAL, DISTRICT FINAL, REGIONAL and SEMIFINALS TICKETS – PASSES
The MHSAA will supply tickets for all levels of the football tournament. (See audit info.)

Ticket Prices:	
District Semifinals:	\$8
District Finals:	\$8
Regionals:	\$10
Semifinals:	\$12
Finals:	\$20

Each competing school at the District Semifinal, District Final, Regional and Semifinals may purchase an allotment of tickets, not to exceed 40 percent of the stadium capacity, from the host manager. Each competing school will receive 10 game passes from the manager to be used for crowd management purposes. Band & cheer team members in full uniform representing competing schools will be admitted without charge. No passes will be honored including league passes, coaches' passes, etc.

11-PLAYER FINAL GAMES --TICKETS--PASSES

All tickets for the Final games will be \$20 per day, not including the cost of parking in Ford Field lots. The ticket holder will be admitted to all four games that day. Pass-outs, however, will not be given at any time during the day. Separate admission will be required each time an individual enters the stadium. Each competing school will receive 10 passes to be used for crowd management purposes. There will be no sale of reserved seats for Final games.

MEETING for REPRESENTATIVES of SCHOOLS COMPETING in FINALS

A Zoom meeting for finalist school principals, athletic directors, or other designated school representatives will be held on Sunday, Nov. 23, at 10 a.m. following the Semifinal games. The meeting will review the final games and band procedures at the Final sites and discuss housing, meals, and other arrangements. Finals information and some passes will be picked up from the host at the Semifinal site. Ticketing information will be provided via email the week of the Semifinals and again at the above-stated meeting.

FINANCES (Host Schools)

MHSAA member schools may not charge a rental fee to MHSAA for hosting a round of the playoffs.

The following stipends are granted to schools which host playoff games whether they are competing schools or pre-determined sites:

Round of Tournament	Host Share	Local Expenses	Travel for Opponents
District Semifinals	25% of gross	Yes	10% of gross
District Finals	25% of gross	Yes	5% of gross
Regionals	25% of gross	Yes	5% of gross
Semifinals *	20% of gross	Yes	\$500/school plus \$500/hotel & mileage
Finals *	None	Yes	\$500/school plus \$500/hotel & mileage

- **No minimums for host or opponents.**
- **Expense of game officials is deducted from remainder of gross profits after the school's share has been deducted.**
- **Local Cost: Cost of line to gain crew can be included as an expense.**

* MHSAA pays \$500 if hotel is required & mileage bonus as follows:

151 to 250 miles one way = \$500
251+ miles one way = another \$500

Audit of Tournament Host Reports – All MHSAA tournament sports sites are subject to audit. Host financial reports are due 30 days after the final game in this tournament.

OVERNIGHT LODGING FEES

A stipend of \$500 will be paid in all rounds of the playoffs to teams that are required by distance and/or schedule to have an overnight stay, which is approved by MHSAA staff.

PARKING and CONCESSIONS

The MHSAA discourages charging for the parking of vehicles at Football Playoff sites. If directed parking is necessary, schools may charge for the service. It is recommended that the price for such service be \$1 for all vehicles unless the customary charge during the regular season is higher. In no event shall parking charges exceed \$3 per vehicle. If parking fees are assessed, it is not acceptable to list expenses for parking attendants as game management expenditure. Concessions will be operated for profit by host school management. The average charge for Finals parking in the Ford Field area will be a minimum of \$6.

MHSAA 2026 SEMIFINAL FOOTBALL GAMES

11-Player Semifinal games will be played on Sat., Nov. 21, 2026 (11/20/26 for Semi-Finals played at NMU). Game times will be 1 p.m. unless one site is scheduled for two games. In that event, there will be two separate sessions at 11:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. or a double header at 11:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.

Assignments to Semifinal sites will be made by the MHSAA staff following the completion of Regional Final games. Based on available venue Internet connectivity, as many Semifinal games as possible will be streamed live on the NFHS Network. Home teams (teams with the highest POP are to wear dark jerseys; visiting teams are to wear white jerseys)

2026 FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP GAMES

Friday and Saturday, Nov. 27 and 28, 2026

Divisions, dates and times are to be determined.

(All 11-Player games at Ford Field, Detroit, Michigan)

Semifinal winners with the highest playoff point average will be home teams and wear dark-colored jerseys. Visitors will wear white colored jerseys.