

16th ANNUAL 8-PLAYER MHSAA FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT

2026 Rules and Regulations 8-Player

Introduction

The 16h Annual MHSAA 8-Player Football Tournament will be conducted on:
Regional Semifinal Oct. 30 or 31 – Regional Final Nov. 6 or 7 - Semifinals Nov. 14 - Finals Nov. 20 or 21

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 total expenses of teams are not guaranteed. Cooperation of all schools will ensure 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.

8-PLAYER SCORING SYSTEM

Will follow the point awards for 11-player, Division 8. **25 points** if you defeat an 8-player 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. Sub-varsity games will **not use** the tie-breaking procedure.

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

8 bonus points are earned for each game, one of the opponents you defeated wins.

4 bonus points are earned for each game one of the opponents you defeated ties.

4 bonus points are earned for each game, one of the opponents you tied wins.

1 bonus point is earned for each game, one of the opponents you tied ties.

1 bonus point is awarded when an opponent who defeated you wins. (No points for your defeat to the opponent.)

- 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 to a decimal number to the nearest thousandth (92.8888 will become 92.889) to determine the playoff average.) **Beginning with the 2025 season** forfeiting schools will no longer receive bonus points for the contest(s) for which they forfeit.
- Varsity games only are to be counted. Non-varsity games are not recorded.
- 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 Regional qualifiers, will be included in the strength of schedule playoff point calculation.
- The number of points a team scores against an opponent have 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 regular season.** Regular season games cancelled because of acts of God or emergency closing of facilities will not be counted unless they are rescheduled and played before the fourth Sunday of October. All games contracted before second Saturday in September and played before the fourth Friday of October will count toward the playoffs even though the game may not have been reported to the MHSAA.
- **Games arranged/contracted after the second Friday of September 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 is 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 the third Saturday of October 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 no later than each Wednesday. The MHSAA intends to publish the names of schools in position to qualify for the playoffs based on their team record and/or playoff average. School enrollments and the number of scheduled games will also 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 to not qualify, that team

will be withdrawn from the Playoffs, but no team will replace it. That team's scheduled Regional 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 in qualifying teams, their seeding or home and away designations.

8-Player games will count only in 8-player playoff points. 11-Player games will count only for 11-player playoff points.

Reporting Procedure

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

Selection Process

There will be 16 Division 1 and 16 Division 2 teams selected to participate in a four-week playoff in two divisions. The top 16 teams from each division with the highest playoff point average will qualify. A minimum of seven 8-Player games must be played to be declared a qualifier. If the original field of qualifiers includes more than 16 teams because of ties, the field will be reduced to that number using the 11-player tie-breaker procedure. Any school whose enrollment exceeds 215 is not eligible to compete in the football tournament (a one-year grace period is given when enrollment rises above 215).

Regional/Semifinal Pairings & Game Hosts

- On Selection Sunday, the 16 qualifying schools will be divided into four geographic regions, each with four teams.
- Using playoff point averages, teams will be seeded within each Regional Semifinal to determine opponents and hosts. The highest average team will host the fourth highest seed, and the school with the second highest average will host the third highest seed.
- If two or more qualifying teams finish with identical point averages within a Regional Semifinal, 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.
- Changes in home and away designations and opponents within a Regional Semifinal may be made no later than 10 a.m. Monday, Oct. 27, 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 Regional Semifinal winner with the highest playoff average will host the Regional championship game.
- When the distance between competing schools is within 75 miles, the host school will determine the day and time of the game. Games may be played at 7 or 7:30 p.m. Friday, 1 p.m. Saturday afternoon, or 7 or 7:30 p.m. Saturday. 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.

Regional Final Game Hosts

Regional championship games will be hosted by the Regional Semifinal 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 Regional Semifinal games.

Semifinal Game Hosts

Semifinal games will be played on Saturday, November 14, 2026. 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)

General Regulations

Forfeitures – The MHSAA must be notified in writing as soon as forfeiture is known, but no later than 24 hours after the occurrence. Written notification should include game details and a 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 Rule - The Point Differential Rule will be in effect during the regular season and playoffs.

Practice - There is to be no practice by the opponent on game fields the week prior to the Regional Semifinal, Regional, Semifinal, and Final games (unless approved by the MHSAA). Host schools are exempt from this regulation.

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 according 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 and Locker Room Privacy Policy

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 ball.** 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 that school will use one of the approved Wilson models provided by the opposing school. If the school refuses to use the opposing team's 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

Regional Semifinal Games -- See preceding page, "Game Hosts."

Regional Games -- See preceding page, "Regional Game Hosts."

Semifinal Games -- The games will be played Saturday afternoon, game times 1:00PM.

Final Games -- Division I: (11:00AM), Division II: (2:00PM)

Tournament Game Field

See the field diagram on the football page on the MHSAA website.

Uniforms

For all rounds of the 8-player tournament, the team with the higher playoff point average will be considered the home team and wear dark colored jerseys; visiting teams are to wear white colored jerseys. (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 Regional Semifinal, Regional, Semifinal, and Final management will select the P.A. announcers and timers.
- Pre-game 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 sidelines 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 for the preceding week with managers of Regional and Semifinal game sites. Schools competing in the Finals must make arrangements with the MHSAA office.

Trophies and Medals

Regionals -- A trophy will be awarded to the winning team at each Regional Final Playoff game. In addition, 30 medals will be awarded to each winning team. For those teams with more than 30 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 after the Final game; 30 medals will be awarded to each winning and runner-up team. For those teams with more than 30 players, additional medals may be purchased through the MHSAA office at the competing team's expense. Members of the MHSAA Representative Council will make postgame award presentations.

Officials

Officials' Fees - The Football Officials Assignment Committee will assign officials to all football playoff games.

- Regional game officials will be paid \$110/ game.
- Semifinal game officials will be paid \$125/ game,
- Final game officials will receive \$125/ game.

Mileage -- Regional Semifinal, Regional Final 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. The 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 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](#).

Regional and Semifinals Tickets

All tickets will be sold via GoFan.co

- Regional Semifinal: \$8
- Regional Final: \$10
- Semifinal: \$12

Each competing school at the Regional Semifinal, Regional and Semifinals may receive an allotment of e-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 members in full uniform representing competing schools will be admitted without charge. No passes will be honored, including league passes, coaches' passes, etc.

Final Games --Tickets--Passes

All tickets for the Final game will be \$12 via NMU Ticketing.

Representatives of Schools Competing in Finals

Finalist school principals, athletic directors, or other designated school representatives will be contacted following the Semifinal games. Final games and band procedures at the Final sites will be reviewed, passes distributed, housing, meals and other arrangements will be discussed.

Finances (Host Schools)

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

The following stipends will be granted to schools that host playoff games, whether they are competing schools or pre-determined sites:

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

- No minimums for host or opponents.

- Expense of game officials is deducted from the remainder of gross profits after the school's share has been deducted.
- Cost of line to gain crew can be included as an expense.

* MHSAA pays \$500 if a 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 which 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.

8-Player Semifinal games will be played on Saturday, Nov. 14, 2026
 A public release announcing sites and times will be made
 Monday morning, Nov. 9, 2026.

**Teams with the higher playoff average will be the home team and wear dark jerseys.
 Visiting teams are to wear white jerseys.**

8-Player Championship Game

Nov. 20 or 21, 2026

Facility: Superior Dome (NMU)

Division I: 11:00 AM

Division II: 2:00 PM

Manager: MHSAA Staff