

SCHOOLBOYS/GIRLS FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND



National Cup COMPETITION RULES Season 2026-27

1. RULE ONE

- a. The abbreviation SFAI shall be used throughout these rules, where appropriate, in place of the full title: Schoolboys/Girls Football Association of Ireland.
- b. The address for the Association is: **Schoolboys-girls Football Association of Ireland, SFAI Secretary, Padraic Clarke, SFAI Secretary, Corliskea, Ballymoe, Castlerea, Co Galway, F45 DD54.**
- c. All entries are subject to acceptance by the SFAI Executive Committee, the entire control, ownership, and management of the competitions is vested in the SFAI Executive Committee and that control and management is delegated to relevant coordinators whose decision/s are final. These rules shall also apply to any regional cup element of the SFAI National Cups for those teams which have qualified to the national rounds draw.

SFAI National Cup/Trophy are played for from U-12 up to U-16 (where team entry levels allow for a competition at each age group) the age eligibility for players being the first day of January relevant to the year in which the standard season concludes.

While registered to a National League club no player can play in any SFAI national Cup/Trophy.

Teams defeated in Round One or Round Two of the Cup shall be entered into the immediate next round of the corresponding Trophy Competition. For the 2026/27 season, teams from the top division of designated leagues will enter the competition at Round Three.

- d. In order to be entered into any SFAI national Cup/Trophy competition each team must be registered to play in a division of a SFAI League, have completed the on-line entry process and paid the appropriate entry fee to the SFAI. If for any reason the League from where any team entered these competitions fails or ceases to be affiliated to the SFAI all such team/s participation in these competitions shall cease with immediate effect irrespective of whether or not that team/s had played or are due to play any fixture(s) in any of these competitions.
- e. The closing date for receipt of fully completed entries and fees will be as set out in the entry form each year, the level of entry fee shall be determined by the SFAI Council at its meeting following the most recent SFAI AGM and all such entry fees shall be non-refundable in all circumstances.
- f. Each team is required to play its fixtures without relying on player/s from any other team(s) within the same club, namely from team(s) which have not been entered into any SFAI Cup/Trophy for the relevant season.
- g. Each team entered must be registered to and playing in a division no higher than the U-16 age group within their own SFAI affiliated League, any team in breach of this rule will be excluded or removed from or any further participation in the relevant season's competition.
- h. Team entries are accepted and processed in advance of the team and League affiliation fees due to be paid to the SFAI by their respective League for the season relevant to that SFAI National Cup/Trophy entry.
- i. Any team which is not affiliated to the SFAI by way of such team affiliation fee payment may be denied any or continued participation in any SFAI National Cup/Trophy for that season at the discretion of the SFAI Executive Committee.
- j. All participating teams are required to fulfil fixtures as scheduled by the SFAI through its coordinators and leagues.

- k. All entries and fees are completed and forwarded to the SFAI by the scheduled date each year.
- l. All teams acknowledge and accept that Leagues do not have the authority to grant a postponement of any fixture scheduled by the SFAI in these competitions. The authority to grant a postponement rests first with the regional coordinator, then at national level, and ultimately with the Executive Committee.
- m. Clubs with multiple team entries at any single age group are required to play their fixtures in such fashion so as not to deviate from or delay the completion of fixtures on the scheduled date. Where deemed necessary for the running of these competitions, clubs may be required to play their fixture/s in advance of the scheduled weekend.
- n. The information submitted on the official entry form will be used by the SFAI and its affiliated leagues solely for the administration of these competitions. By completing and submitting the entry form, each club confirms its understanding and agreement to this condition.
- o. Compliance with Data Protection requirements on the entry form is a condition of entry acceptance.
- p. All rules governing the SFAI and its competitions are the exclusive property of the SFAI. These rules may not be reproduced, distributed, or published (whether in print or online) by any other body or organisation without prior written consent from the SFAI.
- q. The SFAI and its committees will only recognise and act upon matters that reference the current SFAI Rules for Competitions (National Cup/Trophy) and the official SFAI Constitution and Rules, as issued and published by the SFAI. Quotations or interpretations from unofficial or outdated sources will not be accepted. Additionally, directions provided on prevailing official SFAI Cup/Trophy match cards carry the same authority and effect as the rules set out herein.
- r. The standard season referred to in these rules is from 1st August to 30th June annually.
- s. The SFAI Executive Committee reserves the right to address and resolve any matters or circumstances that may arise and are not expressly provided for within these rules.
- t. Each team/club participating in these competitions is fully responsible for the conduct and behaviour of its players, managers, coaches, assistants, parents, and supporters.

Any reports of misconduct involving such individuals will be treated as disciplinary matters by the SFAI and may result in sanctions, the nature and severity of which shall be determined by the relevant investigating committee.

- u. All players, teams, and associated individuals are required to cooperate with and participate in any videography or photography authorised by the SFAI for the purpose of promoting these competitions. Such media may be published by the SFAI across digital platforms and other public media channels. By entering these competitions, clubs and teams grant the SFAI permission to capture and publish images and footage involving all relevant persons, including under-age players, in accordance with this rule. Non-compliance may result in disciplinary action, with the nature and severity of any sanction determined by the SFAI Investigating Committee.
- v. All players, teams, and associated individuals are required to cooperate with and take part in any trophy or medal presentation ceremonies related to these competitions. Non-compliance with this requirement may result in disciplinary action for those responsible, with the nature and severity of any sanction determined by the SFAI Investigating Committee.

2. RULE TWO

- a. The competitions are drawn on a regional basis and then an open national draw from the round of 32 onwards, for Boys and Girls.
- b. The Leagues comprising any region are determined by the SFAI Executive Committee.
- c. Regional and national coordinators, under the jurisdiction of the SFAI Executive Committee, will coordinate fixtures and assist with the administration of the competitions.
- d. All competition draws shall be conducted at venues designated by the SFAI, with completed draws published on the official SFAI website.

Upon completion of the regional rounds, fixtures for the national stages (from Round of 32 onwards) shall be determined through direct liaison between the relevant League officials

and National Coordinator. All decisions made by the National Coordinator in this regard shall be considered final and binding.

- e. The number of qualifying places allocated to each region for the national (round of 32) draw is determined proportionally based on the total number of teams entered across all age groups in that region for the current season. This ratio of national round qualifying places shall be applied consistently across all age groups within each region.
- f. All SFAI leagues are required to assist fully with the smooth operation of these competitions. By submitting an entry, each club and its affiliated league agree to provide complete cooperation in the administration of the competitions and the completion of fixtures as determined by the SFAI Executive Committee. Should such cooperation not be provided, or be withdrawn, the SFAI Executive Committee reserves the sole right to refuse or remove entries, including those teams that have already commenced their fixtures.
- g. Where clubs have more than one team entry at any age group the relevant teams, upon completion of the entry form and payment of the entry fees, will be admitted and listed with the name of the club and, if supplied to the SFAI, a divisional pre-fix. Where the entrant club has not supplied such a pre-fix on its entry form the SFAI will list each team as A, B, C, etc. and those prefixes will apply for the purposes of carrying out the Cups draws, no club is allowed to enter teams under more than one club name.

3. RULE THREE

- a. All match cards shall be issued by the SFAI to its affiliated leagues. Upon completion of fixtures, these match cards must be returned to the SFAI in digital format.

All team sheets and match reports must be submitted as a scanned copy or clear image to teamsheets@sfaie.com

Any supplementary match reports should also be sent to this email address. All documents must be submitted within 48 hours of the fixture taking place.

- b. Referee reports and all disciplinary matters shall be addressed through a formal hearing conducted by a Disciplinary Committee comprising three current and impartial members of the SFAI Council.

The Committee holds full authority to request reports, summon witnesses, and impose sanctions or fines as it deems appropriate. It retains sole discretion in determining which individuals are required to attend such hearings, whether as witness(es) or defendant(s).

- c. No Coordinator or League official shall participate in any disciplinary hearing on behalf of the SFAI Executive Committee where the matter under review involves a club from their own League.
- d. Decisions made and sanctions imposed by a Disciplinary Committee are not subject to appeal within the SFAI. Any appeal must, in the first instance, be directed to the FAI and shall be governed by the relevant FAI rules and procedures.
- e. For the purposes of registration and discipline – the Cup and Trophy at the same age/gender will be deemed the same competition
- f. Any player sent off during an SFAI National Cup/Trophy fixture shall automatically be suspended from their next match in the same competition. If the player's team has been eliminated, the suspension shall apply to their next competitive fixture at the registered age group.

Upon reviewing the referee's report, the Disciplinary Committee reserves the right to impose further sanctions if considered necessary and appropriate to the circumstances.

It is the sole responsibility of each club to ensure that any automatic suspension is served. The SFAI, or any other football authority, shall not be held accountable for issuing reminders or notifications in this regard.

- g. Players serving an automatic one-match suspension because of a dismissal in a domestic league fixture remain eligible to participate in SFAI National Cup/Trophy matches. The

suspension must be served in the next scheduled domestic competition fixture following the relevant SFAI National Cup/Trophy game.

- h. Players serving a suspension greater than the automatic one-match ban, as imposed by a League, are ineligible to participate in SFAI National Cup/Trophy fixtures for the duration of that suspension. Matches missed in the SFAI National Cup/Trophy shall count as game(s) toward the fulfilment of the suspension.
- i. Where a player is likely to receive a suspension exceeding the automatic one-match ban, a copy of the referee's report (if available) shall be provided to the player's club. The player, accompanied by a club representative(s), shall be offered the opportunity to attend a hearing before an SFAI Disciplinary Committee. Failure by either the player or the club to attend the hearing will result in the matter being considered and adjudicated in their absence.
- j. It is the responsibility of each club to ensure that all suspensions are properly served by the relevant individuals. This includes automatic suspensions resulting from dismissals in SFAI National Cup/Trophy fixtures, as well as any additional sanctions imposed by the SFAI.

4. RULE FOUR

All SFAI National Cup/Trophy trophies remain the sole property of the SFAI.

Clubs awarded a trophy are responsible for its safekeeping while in their possession and must return it upon request, in good condition.

Any club that returns a damaged trophy, or fails to return a trophy due to loss, shall be liable for the cost of its repair or replacement.

Medals shall be presented to the winners and runners-up of all SFAI National Cup/Trophy competitions.

5. RULE FIVE

- a. The FAI Connect system will serve as the official player registration platform for teams playing in SFAI National Cup/Trophy competitions.
 - i. A player must be properly registered on the FAI Connect system no later than the day before competing in an SFAI National Cup/Trophy game.
 - ii. Proof of date of registration will suffice in order to comply with this rule.
 - iii. Clubs may request to view a player's registration form/status as part of a protest process. Such requests must be submitted in writing to the SFAI, who will obtain a copy on behalf of the requesting club.
- b. SFAI Leagues must ensure that all team and player registration records and details are submitted to the SFAI Executive Committee, or any of its sub-committees as requested.

6. RULE SIX

- a. Players may only participate for a team that is entered in the SFAI National Cup/Trophy to which they are registered.
- b. For the purposes of player eligibility, the SFAI National Cup and Trophy competitions within any given age group are considered a single entity. Once a player has participated for a team in either, they are ineligible to play for any other team in that age group for the remainder of the season.
- c. A player may represent only one team of the same gender in any given age group per season.
- d. Younger players from within the same club may participate in an older age group team, provided they are duly registered. Like all players, they are subject to the one-team-per-age-group restriction for the duration of the season.
- e. Player's registered to any League other than a SFAI affiliated League are not eligible to play in any SFAI National Cup/Trophy

7. RULE SEVEN

- a. Prior to kick-off, the adult official responsible for each team must complete the referee's match card and sign it to confirm the eligibility of the players listed. By signing the card, the official accepts full responsibility for the accuracy of the player details provided and for any eligibility irregularities relating to their team.
- b. All match durations, pitch dimensions, ball sizes, and player number formats must comply with the prevailing FAI Player Development Plan (PDP). Each team is responsible for providing one football of the appropriate size and quality at the game venue.
- c. A maximum of 16 players may be named on the team sheet for U-12 matches. All listed players are eligible to participate under the roll-on, roll-off substitution system.
- d. A maximum of 18 players may be named on the referee's match card for 11-a-side fixtures. All listed players are eligible to participate under the roll-on, roll-off substitution system.
- e. All substitutions must be made with prior notification to the match referee. It is the sole responsibility of each team's management to ensure that the number of players on the field does not exceed the maximum permitted for the relevant age group at any point during the match.
- f. Girls are permitted to play on boys' teams across all age groups. Additionally, a girl may participate one year below her nominal age group when playing on a boys' team. For example, a girl eligible by date of birth for U-14 may play on a U-13 boys' team.
- g. In the event of a playing kit colour clash, the home team is responsible for changing to an alternative set of colours in all rounds of the competition, excluding the Final.
- h. In the Final, the nominated away team must change kit if there is a colour clash.

8. RULE EIGHT

- a. Any club in doubt as to the eligibility of its opponent's players can make representations to the match referee at half time and/or full time to request the signatures and dates of birth of any three (3) opposition players entered on the match card. Any team's refusal to comply with such a request will be regarded as an effort to conceal an irregularity in registration and/or the over-age status of its player(s) and constitutes a breach of this rule.
- b. While signatures and dates of birth may be used as part of any protest regarding player(s) eligibility, they may not be the sole basis for a protest, and their absence will not preclude the filing of a protest. All evidence, including but not limited to the signatures and dates of birth, can be presented at any subsequent protest hearing. However, this evidence cannot include photographs or videos.
- c. Where a team is found guilty of playing an over-age player/s, and had won the relevant game, it shall forfeit that game to the opposing team and be removed from the competition from that stage. The offending team mentor/s may be suspended and their club fined, the levels of which suspension and fine will be determined by the committee dealing with the case.
- d. Where a team, having won the relevant game, is found guilty of playing an ineligible but not overage player/s, the game will be forfeited to the opposing team. The offending team mentor/s may be suspended and their club liable to a fine, the levels of which suspension and fine will be determined by the committee dealing with the case.
- e. Where a team, having lost the relevant game, is found guilty of playing an ineligible or overage player/s, the offending team mentor/s may be suspended and his/her club liable to a fine, the levels of which suspension and fine will be determined by the committee dealing with the case.
- f. Any player named on the match card is deemed to be subject to this rule regardless of whether he/she played in the relevant game.

9. RULE NINE

- a. Any protest, whether concerning overage players or any other reason, must be submitted by registered post to the SFAI Secretary within three (3) days following the date of the match.
- b. The protest must be accompanied by the appropriate fee, as set by the SFAI Council at its first meeting of the season. The fee set for appeals and protests for the 2026-27 season is €500.

- c. For the purposes of this rule, the day of the match, Saturdays, Sundays, and Bank/Public Holidays are excluded from the three-day calculation.
- d. An exact copy of the protest must also be sent by registered post within the same time frame to the club against whom the protest is being lodged.
- e. Protest fees must be submitted by postal order or bank draft only. Fees submitted in any other form or by any other method will be deemed invalid and will nullify the protest. Only protests received from one or both clubs involved in the relevant fixture will be considered.

10. RULE TEN

- a. Protests are dealt with by a committee comprising three neutral, current members of the SFAI Council. The decisions of the protest committee are final and binding, subject only to the right of appeal to the FAI.
- b. The committee has the authority to determine whether a protest has been submitted in accordance with the rules and to rule it in or out of order accordingly.
- c. Any team disqualified from an SFAI National Cup or Trophy because of a protest decision shall, by default, be automatically removed from all associated elements of that competition for the relevant season.

11. RULE ELEVEN

- a. SFAI National Cup and Trophy fixtures take precedence over all other matches, including League domestic games, Inter-League fixtures, and any club- or League-organised tournaments or fixtures of any kind.

For weekend matches, excluding Finals, the home team's League shall determine whether the fixture is scheduled for Saturday or Sunday, in accordance with its standard scheduling practices to minimise disruption to its overall fixture planning.

- b. Clubs and teams are strictly prohibited from organising or agreeing fixture arrangements between themselves without prior approval from the relevant SFAI authority (a league or regional or national fixtures coordinator).
- c. Any such unauthorised arrangements may be cancelled by the SFAI Executive Committee or its appointed representatives, who shall not be held responsible for any consequences arising from the cancellation of these fixtures.
- d. No club, team, or affiliated League can cancel, postpone, or alter the scheduled date or kick-off time of any SFAI National Cup or Trophy fixture without prior approval. For fixtures in the regional rounds, consent must be obtained from the designated regional coordinator. From the Round of 32 onwards must have the consent of the relevant SFAI coordinator.
- e. Any club, team, or League that alters a fixture without the required consent shall be considered in breach of this rule and may be subject to sanction by the SFAI Executive Committee. The nature and extent of any sanction shall be determined solely at the discretion of the Committee.
- f. Emergency matters arising during regional rounds shall be handled solely by the designated regional coordinator. From the Round of 32 onwards, such matters fall under the jurisdiction of the national coordinator. All decisions issued in response to emergencies are final and not subject to appeal.
- g. Requests for fixture postponement on the grounds of school tours or school entrance examinations will only be granted when all the following conditions are satisfied:
 - i. Written confirmation is provided by the school tour or exam organising body.
 - ii. The confirmation includes the names of the affected players.
 - iii. At least two (2) players from the team are directly impacted.

Only upon receipt of all required documentation will the relevant coordinator, in consultation with the Secretary of the club's League, consider and approve the request.
- h. Fixture postponement requests due to international duty will only be granted when a single team has, concurrently, either two outfield players or its goalkeeper officially selected for international representation. Players listed on any form of standby or provisional status shall not be considered for the purposes of this rule.
- i. The appointed referee, or their designated substitute, shall determine whether a pitch is playable. In the event of a postponement due to pitch or weather conditions, the home team

must secure an alternative venue. If no suitable alternative is provided, the fixture shall be reversed to the opponent's ground. All arrangements relating to such fixture reversals are subject to the control and approval of the relevant coordinator.

- j. If a fixture is commenced but subsequently abandoned due to adverse weather or pitch conditions, the home team shall forfeit home advantage. The fixture will be reversed to the opponent's ground. All arrangements for such reversals are subject to the control and approval of the relevant coordinator.
- k. All weather playing surfaces, where available, can be used for SFAI National Cup/Trophy games provided these are in complete compliance with, and certified as such, the current FAI standards/codes. This certification shall be available for inspection on demand.
- l. Where an artificial playing surface may be used, the home club must notify the visiting club no later than two days prior to the fixture date. This notification must include any restrictions regarding permitted footwear on the surface. This rule pertains exclusively to the type of pitch being used and does not relate to notification of the actual fixture details.
- m. Any team that concedes a walkover shall have a 3–0 scoreline recorded against them and may be subject to sanction by the SFAI Executive Committee or a designated sub-committee.
 - i. Except where exceptional circumstances are accepted by the Executive Committee, a team conceding a walkover shall be automatically excluded from all further participation in that season's competitions.
 - ii. For the avoidance of doubt, any team that concedes a walkover in Round 1 or Round 2 of the SFAI National Cup shall be ineligible to enter the SFAI Trophy Competitions.
- n. Claims for the award of a game must be sent in writing by registered post and be signed by the relevant club Hon. Secretary to the SFAI Secretary within three (3) days following the fixture date, for the purposes of this rule Saturdays, Sundays and Bank/Public Holidays and the day of the relevant game are excluded.

12. RULE TWELVE

- a. All fixtures must commence at the appointed kick-off time.
- b. Any team that fails to start the match within fifteen (15) minutes of the scheduled time may be deemed to have conceded a walkover, subject to investigation by the SFAI Executive Committee or its appointed sub-committee.
- c. The match referee is required to report any late starts.

13. RULE THIRTEEN

- a. All SFAI National Cup and Trophy fixtures from the semi-final stage onwards shall be officiated by a team of three match officials: one referee and two assistant referees.

14. RULE FIFTEEN

All SFAI National Cup Finals shall be hosted at a suitable venue, as determined by the Executive Committee or its appointed sub-committees.

15. RULE SIXTEEN

- a. In all SFAI National Cup and Trophy fixtures, the home team shall be responsible for payment of referee fees, apart from the final matches.

16. RULE SEVENTEEN

- a. In all fixtures, the home team is responsible for ensuring that the pitch meets all necessary requirements to allow the game to proceed. This includes the provision of appropriate stewarding for both the playing area and its immediate surroundings.