IRISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

CHALLENGE CUP COMPETITION RULES

Annual Competition
1. The Cup shall be called the ‘Irish Football Association Challenge Cup’ and shall be
governed by the Challenge Cup Committee, hereinafter known as the Committee.

2. The Competition for the Cup shall be annual and open to Clubs in full membership
of the NIFL Premiership (hereinafter Senior Clubs) and such other Clubs as may be
permitted to compete. Such other clubs must also compete in the Intermediate Cup
Competition during the current season. Any club withdrawing from the Intermediate
Cup and without sufficient reason for so doing shall be debarred from competing in
the Challenge Cup for the ensuing three seasons. **Entry for permission to
compete in the competition shall be made online via IFA website, not later
than 30 June and shall be accompanied by an entry fee of £50.00.** It shall be
the sole responsibility of clubs to enter in order to participate in the competition.
This application shall affect a club for one season only. The Competition shall be
conducted under the Articles of Association, the Laws of the Game, and these
Rules. The Committee may at its discretion accept sponsorship for the Competition
or any part thereof.

Committee may call upon players or clubs objected to for proof of qualification.
3. Notwithstanding anything in any Rule, if the Committee, has any doubt at any time
and whether arising out of a Protest or otherwise as to the qualification of any player
taking part in the Competition, they shall have power to call upon such player and/or
Club to which he belongs, or for which he played, to prove that he is qualified
according to the Rules. Any Club found guilty of fielding an ineligible player in any
round of the competition and prior to the next round being played, up to and
including the semi-final tie may be fined up to a maximum sum of £250.00.
Furthermore, the said club will be dismissed from the competition and the club
losing the game in such circumstances shall replace the dismissed club and
progress to the next round.

Eligible Players
4. The competing teams shall number eleven players each. While the players in each
team may be changed, no individual shall play for more than one Club in the
Challenge Cup in the same season.

To be eligible to participate in the Challenge Cup all players must be registered by
their clubs, in accordance with the IFA Professional Game Player Registration
Regulations.

For the avoidance of any doubt to be eligible to play in this competition a player
must also be eligible to participate for his club in the relevant league competition
and must have been registered during one of the two professional game registration
periods. The registration periods are:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registration Period</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First registration period</td>
<td>10 June – 1 September</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second registration period</td>
<td>2 January – 1 February</td>
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Clubs who play in a purely amateur league competition and who are permitted to register players to participate in such purely amateur competition outside the above registration periods shall not be permitted to play any player so registered in this competition until the commencement of the subsequent registration period.

No player who is registered by his club after 31st January shall be eligible to participate in that same season.

Completion of team sheet/match card
Each Club shall complete the official team sheet/match card by including the names of players and club officials and their functions taking part in each match (including the name of the nominated substitutes) and submit to the Referee/4th Official 1 hour prior to kick-off for matches from round one to round four and 75 minutes prior to kick-off from round 5 to the final tie. Players’ names must correspond with the numbers assigned on the official team sheet/match card. The Secretary or other responsible official shall verify the accuracy of the information provided by signing the team sheet/match card.

Substitute Players
A club may at its discretion use three substitute players at any time in any tie, except to replace a player who has been expelled from the game by the referee. The substitutions can only be made when play is stopped for any reason and the referee has given permission. Only three substitutions by each side will be permitted in any tie and the substitute players shall be nominated prior to the commencement of the tie. Clubs may nominate a maximum of five substitute players, from which three substitutions shall be permitted.

Players must wear registered colours
5. The players in each competing team must wear the registered colours of the club for which they are playing, except when opposing teams have similar colours in which case the visiting club shall change. In a semi-final or final tie, or any other tie played on neutral ground, where opposing teams have similar colours both teams will change unless they are agreed that only one need to do so. The colours of the club shall be taken as the colour of the shirt, shorts and socks. A goalkeeper must wear a shirt of different colour, and said shirt must be of a colour distinctive from that of his opponents. Referees shall have power to instruct a Club to change any part of their playing kit if he considers the colour not quite distinctive from that of his opponents, and the Referee shall have power to deal with any player refusing to comply with this instruction.

The duration of a match
6. The duration of each match shall be 90 minutes. The match must be started at the time appointed by the Committee, but no protest will be upheld for late starting, unless the Committee is satisfied that the result of the match was affected by such delay.

The referee shall have power to allow additional time for stoppages, his decision thereon to be final. If a match has been stopped by the referee, before the
completion of the time specified, for any reason stated in Law 5 of the Laws of the Game, the Committee shall have power to deal with the matter as they may determine.

7. In order to determine the additional clubs to join the Senior Clubs in the Competition, the Committee may play a qualifying round or rounds of ties. In the event of the Committee deciding to play a qualifying round or rounds of ties, it shall then determine which clubs shall be invited to participate. Ties shall be played on the ground of the first drawn club (subject to the conditions detailed in rule 10). A player who plays for a club in a qualifying round(s) cannot play for another in the competition during the same season.

**Competition format**
8. The Committee shall determine the competition format.

**Byes may be given**
The Committee may draw subsequent round or rounds before the winners of the previous rounds have been declared, and the winners according to such draw shall compete against each as in the previous round. The Committee shall have power to exempt any number of Clubs from any number of rounds, and byes may be given so that the required number of additional clubs is obtained to play in the round where the Senior Clubs enter the Competition.

**Entry levels**
There shall be three entry levels in the competition.
(i) Clubs playing intermediate status football (with the exception of NIFL Championship clubs) shall enter the competition at the first entry level.
(ii) Clubs playing in the NIFL Championship shall enter the competition at the second entry level.
(iii) Clubs playing in the NIFL Premiership (Senior Clubs) shall enter the competition at the third entry level.

**Draw after Bye**
9. In the event of a club getting a bye in any of the drawings, the Committee at the subsequent drawing, shall first draw a Club to play against it from the lot, the two shall again be put in the ballot-box and again drawn, and the club first out of the box shall have choice of ground (subject to the conditions detailed in rule 10): but the Committee may so arrange that four clubs compete in the semi-finals.

**Method of Drawing**
10. a) In principle the club that is first drawn in the ballot shall play at their registered home venue. However, should a club that enters the competition at the first entry level be drawn against a club that enters the competition at a later entry level (ie, either an NIFL Premiership club or NIFL Championship club) the tie will be played at the registered home venue of the club that enters the competition at the later stage.

b) Should a club from the second entry level (NIFL Championship) be drawn against another club from the second entry level (NIFL Championship) or a club from the third entry level (NIFL Premiership) the tie shall be played on the registered home venue of the first drawn club.
c) The first drawn club may forfeit home advantage with the agreement of their opponents and in such circumstances written confirmation of same must be notified to the Secretary by both clubs not later than 5 days following the date of the relevant draw.

d) Each club entering the competition should play their home games on their registered home ground (unless otherwise directed in exceptional circumstances by the Committee, Health and Safety authorities or the PSNI). Any match expenses incurred in staging a game at a neutral venue, in any round prior to the semi-finals and final, will be the responsibility of the club that was first drawn in the ballot.

e) Should a club having a registered home ground which, for whatever reason be unavailable (excluding inclement weather conditions) be drawn at home, they must travel to the ground of their opponents. Any match expenses incurred in staging a game in any round prior to the semi-finals and final will be the responsibility of the club that was first drawn in the ballot.

11. In the event of any match resulting in a draw extra time of fifteen minutes each way shall be played, and should the score be equal at the end of this period of extra time, the match shall be decided by the taking of kicks from the penalty mark in accordance with the conditions approved by International FA Board.

Cost of Appeal
12. In the event of one of the competing clubs appealing that the ground of its opponent is not private, or fit and proper to be played upon, a committee of inspection shall be appointed by the Committee to investigate and decide the question. The appeal must be lodged with the Secretary of the Association by Special Delivery letter five days previous to the date fixed for the match together with an inspection fee of £100. In the event of an appeal not being sustained the fee will be forfeited, but should the appeal be sustained, the club appealed against shall be required to refund the same through the Secretary of the Association previous to the tie being played. No protest will be entertained after a match as to the privacy of a ground, provided there has been sufficient time to enable clubs to take advantage of this Rule.

Neutral Grounds for Semi-finals
13. In the semi-finals the grounds shall be chosen by the Committee, and shall be neutral unless otherwise determined by the Committee who may, upon request, permit the match or matches to be played at the registered home venue of either of the participating teams. The final tie shall be played at Windsor Park unless otherwise determined by the Committee. Should any club participate in the final tie at their registered ground no ground rent will be payable.

Annual Returns
14. Under article 4 of the Articles of Association each club must forward, to the Association on or before 31st July each year, the following:-

(1) Whether ground is public or private
(2) Situation of ground
(3) Colours of Club shirt, shorts and socks.
(4) The name and address of Secretary

Private Ground
NOTE: A private ground shall be taken to be a ground over which the Club has sole control during the match, properly enclosed so as to prevent spectators entering the ground except by admission gates, and in which the dressing rooms and other appurtenances shall be up to standard required by the Committee. A fee must be charged for all Cup Tie matches and the minimum admission prices shall be fixed annually by the Committee. In this Competition the dimensions of the field of play shall be:

- Maximum length: 120 metres
- Minimum length: 90 metres
- Maximum breadth: 90 metres
- Minimum breadth: 45 metres

Clubs shall be drawn in lots
15. The lots shall be drawn and Competition matches played as the Committee may determine, and immediately after each drawing the Secretary shall intimate to each of the clubs drawn the name and the colours of the Club it is drawn against and the date upon which the tie is to be played.

Clubs failing to play
16. Any club refusing or failing to play the club against which it has been drawn on the date fixed by the committee and without sufficient reasons for doing so, shall be adjudged to have lost the match, and otherwise dealt with as the Committee may determine.

When postponed games must be played
In the event of a tie prior to the round where the Senior Clubs enter being postponed the clubs must forthwith arrange to meet on the following Saturday. In the event of a tie from where the Senior Clubs enter to the Quarter Finals being postponed the clubs must arrange to meet on a date to be determined by the Committee. In the case of such a postponed tie should only one of the clubs concerned have floodlights available at its registered home venue the rearranged tie shall be played at the venue with floodlights. In the case of protested ties the Committee shall decide the dates and venues. Should either club refuse to compete, the club shall be removed from the competition, and otherwise dealt with as the Committee may determine.

Match Officials
17. In all matches the match officials shall be appointed by the IFA administration.

   1) In matches up to and including Round 3 only a Referee shall be appointed.
   2) In Round 4 and Round 5 matches a Referee and two Assistant Referees shall be appointed.
   3) In matches from Round 6 onwards a Referee, two Assistant Referees and a 4th Official shall be appointed.
The committee may, at its discretion, also appoint Additional Assistant Referees to matches from Round 6 onwards. Any costs (including match fee and travelling expenses) associated with the appointment of Additional Assistant Referees shall be borne by the Association.

In all matches prior to the semi finals it will be the responsibility of the home team to pay the match officials fees and expenses on the day of the match. In the semi final and final matches the Association will be responsible for making payment to the match officials.

18. On points of fact connected with the play over which the Assistant Referees have control, their decision should be given by flags. The Referee must use a whistle. In the question of interpretation of these rules or the laws of the game, an appeal may be made to the Committee, but the Referee’s decision must be acted on in the field.

Protests and appeals
19. Protests and appeals must be received by the Secretary of the Association per special delivery letter* bearing post mark within two days after the cause of the protest or appeal accompanied by a deposit of £100 which shall be forfeited in all cases where the protest or appeal has not been sustained.

Protests against ineligible players must give the names of players protested against, and also cause of protest.

Copies must be sent to Club protested against
A copy of the protest or appeal must also be sent by special delivery letter* to the club protested against bearing post mark within two days after the cause of the protest or appeal.

In no case will the deposit be returned after received by the Secretary of the Association unless the protest or appeal is upheld or withdrawn.

* The proof of posting of such special delivery letter shall be the postmark on the certificate of posting.

Objections to ground, etc
Goal-nets must be used in all cup ties. Any objection to ground, goal-posts, goal-nets or ball must be lodged in writing by the Captain for the day with the Referee before the game, and the Referee shall have power to have such objections made right before the game starts.

Referee to inspect Ground
In case of unfavourable weather conditions the Referee, to be appointed by the Association, shall inspect the ground not less than three hours previous to the scheduled time of kick-off or earlier if requested by the home club, and shall immediately give his decision as to the fitness of ground for play.

No game shall be postponed without an inspection by a referee appointed by the Association, who shall take due cognizance of local advice and the travelling supporters.
In the event of a Referee not arriving at the ground by the time of kick off the match shall be postponed and the clubs must agree to re-arrange the match in accordance with rule 16.

**Intimidation by spectators**

20. When it can be proven that the partisans of the club which has the choice of ground systematically interfere with the play of opposing clubs, by using improper language or inciting the home players to use violence to their opponents, on the application of the club which is to play against said club the committee shall have power to order the match to be played on another ground, neutral if possible.

**Decision of Committee Final**

21. All questions of eligibility or qualification of competitors, or of application of these rules or the laws of the game, shall be referred to the committee, whose decision shall be final, and they shall have power to withhold the cup and medals or mementoes.

The Committee shall also have the power to deal with any other matter not provided for in these rules.

**Agreement for Cup**

22. It shall be the responsibility of the winning club to return the cup to the Association on or before the 1st day of March or earlier if so requested by the Association. The winning club shall return the cup in good or like condition and shall be liable for any costs in the event that the cup is destroyed by fire, or lost, or damaged by any other accident whilst in the possession of the club.

**Medals**

23. The Association will present medals only to the participants in the final tie. For the avoidance of any doubt this shall include the 16 players, Manager and Secretary of each club.

**Admission to matches**

24. A fee must be charged at all cup tie matches and the minimum admission charges will be determined annually by the Committee.

**Division of receipts**

25. In all ties previous to Semi-Finals, the gate receipts after payment of the costs pertaining to referees, professional security company, turnstiles, ambulance/first aid cover and ticketing, shall be equally divided between the two competing Clubs. (The home club shall ensure that copies of the receipts for such costs are furnished to the away team upon request).

Payment shall be made to the away team within 7 days following the date on which the match was played, except when the match has been designated as an ‘all ticket’ match. In such circumstances, all revenue generated from the sale of tickets by the away team shall be paid to the home team within 7 days following the date on which the match was played together with a reconciliation of unsold tickets (the home
team shall then make payment to the away team within 7 days of receiving such
revenue).

Non payment by the deadlines for either the home or away teams shall result in an
automatic increase of 10% of the monies due for up to 7 days late payment and
20% between 7 to 14 days late payment. All other cases shall be referred to the
Committee who will deal with the matter as they consider appropriate.

Season tickets shall not be valid for any tie played in this Competition.

Division of Semi-Final receipts
26. In the semi-final ties the nett receipts (including stands) shall be divided as follows:
10% to the Association and the balance divided equally amongst the competing
clubs.

In principle all tickets for semi-final ties will be sold via the Association’s online
ticketing platform. However, in the event that the clubs are required to sell tickets
then all money generated from the sale of tickets in respect of semi-final and final
ties must be submitted by the respective clubs to the Association within 14 days
following the date of the match together with a reconciliation of unsold tickets.
Non-payment by this deadline shall result in an automatic increase of 10% of the
monies due for up to seven (7) days late payment and 20% between seven (7) to
fourteen (14) days late payment. All other cases shall be referred to the committee
who will deal with the matter as they consider appropriate.

Final Tie receipts
27. In the Final Tie, the receipts after all expenses are paid, shall be divided as follows:
The Association to take 20% and the remaining balance to be equally divided
between the competing clubs.

All tickets for the final tie shall be sold via the Association’s online ticketing platform.

Committee may alter Rules
28. The Committee shall, except as to the returns by Clubs, have power to alter these
Rules, but in no case shall they do so until after the Final Tie has been played in
any year.

*Special Note: Sundays shall not be reckoned in the computation in these Rules.