

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/NIFL Championship (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 Comet FMS, 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: -

First registration period	-	9 June – 31 August
Second registration period	-	1 January – 31 January

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 by including the names of players and Team officials (a maximum of 6 officials) and their functions taking part in each match (including the name of the nominated substitutes) and confirm the lineup via Comet FMS 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. The Club Comet user shall be considered to verify the accuracy of the information provided on the team sheet via Comet FMS.

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.

In matches up to and including Round 4 Clubs may nominate a maximum of five substitute players, from which three substitutions shall be permitted.

In matches from Round 5 onwards, clubs may nominate a maximum of seven substitute players, from which three substitutions shall be permitted.

Exceptionally, a fourth substitute may take part exclusively during extra time in all rounds of the competition.

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 two entry levels in the competition.

- (i) Clubs playing intermediate status football shall enter the competition at the first entry level.
- (ii) Clubs playing in the NIFL Premiership/NIFL Championship shall enter the competition at the second 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 an intermediate club that enters the competition at the first or second entry level be drawn against a senior club the tie will be played at the registered home venue of the senior club.
- b)** 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.
- c)** 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.

d) 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 the International FA Board.

Venues for Semi-finals and Finals

12. 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 the National Football Stadium, 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

13. 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 - 55 metres

Clubs shall be drawn in lots

14. 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

15. 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

16. In all matches the match officials shall be appointed by the IFA administration.
 - 1) In matches up to and including Round 4 only a Referee shall be appointed.
 - 2) In 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.
 - 4) Reserve Assistant Referee will also be appointed to final tie.

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.

17. 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

18. Protests 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 accompanied by a deposit of £100 which shall be forfeited in all cases where the protest has not been sustained.

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

Copies must be sent to Club protested against

A copy of the protest 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.

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

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

Protest – objection to ground

19. In the event of one of the competing clubs protesting 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 protest 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 a protest not being sustained the fee will be forfeited, but should the protest be sustained, the club protested 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.

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 a responsible club official on 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.

Powers of Committee

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 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 18 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 up to Semi-Final

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 and Final receipts

26. (i) 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.

(ii) 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.

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 7 days following the date of the match. In respect of such ticket sales any balance of unsold tickets must be returned to the Association by a pre-determined date, which in all cases will be a date prior to the match, or the club shall be financially liable for the balance.

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

Committee may alter Rules

27. 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.***