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IRISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

FONACAB CRAIG STANFIELD JUNIOR CUP COMPETITION RULES

SEASON 2026-27

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1 – Annual Competition

- a) The Cup shall be called the 'Irish Football Association Junior Challenge Cup' and shall be governed by the Junior and Youth Cup Committee, hereinafter known as the Committee.
- b) The Competition shall be Annual, and open to Clubs, members of the Irish Football Association Ltd., subject to the approval of the Junior & Youth Cup Committee. Applications will only be considered from clubs in membership of recognised Leagues. Any club which has not competed in the Junior Cup Competition the previous season must have been in membership of a recognised league during the previous season. Only one team from each Club will be admitted to the Competition.

2 – Date of Application

Application for permission to compete in the Competition shall be made online via Comet FMS, not later than 31 July 2026 accompanied by an entry fee of £20.00. It shall be the sole responsibility of clubs to enter in order to participate in the competition. 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.

3 – Committee may call upon players

- a) 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.
- b) Any Club found guilty of fielding an ineligible player in any round of the competition may be removed from the Competition. In addition to this, the Club may be debarred from competing for up to three seasons and may be fined up to a maximum sum of £50.00 for each ineligible player.
- c) In such circumstances the Committee shall have the power to reinstate the defeated team to the competition providing the following round has not yet taken place.

4 – Qualification of Players

- a) The competing teams should consist of 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.

- b) Notwithstanding the additional restrictions in Rule 5, to be eligible to play in the competition players must be registered and eligible to play for their Club in their respective league competition.
- c) A player shall be construed as taking part in the game for which he was nominated only if he has actually played in the game. For the avoidance of doubt, an unused substitute shall not be construed as having played in the game.

5 – Ineligible Players

- a) Should a player take part in any Cup Tie Match for the Irish Challenge Cup or Intermediate Cup he may not compete for the Junior Cup in the same season, except in the case of Junior teams, three members of which may play for the Senior or Intermediate teams of the same Club. However, no such player/s shall play in more than two matches collectively in the Irish Challenge Cup or Intermediate Cup.
- b) In addition, the following shall be ineligible to compete for the Craig Stanfield Junior Cup:
 - i. Any player who has played in the current or previous three seasons in a Senior International match.
 - ii. Any player who in the current or previous season has played in the Final Tie of any Senior Competition.
 - iii. Any player who in the current or previous season has played in the final tie of any Intermediate status competition except a player who has played in such final as a member of a Junior Club.
 - iv. Any player who has played in more than 12 competitive matches for NIFL Senior Clubs during the current and previous season collectively.
 - v. Any player who has taken part in more than six competitive matches for Senior or Intermediate Clubs collectively during the current season.
 - vi. A professional player shall not be allowed to take part in the Junior Cup Competition.

6 – Completion of Team Lineup

- a) For each match, each Club shall complete the team lineup by including the names of players, team officials (a maximum of 6 officials) and their functions (including the name of the nominated substitutes) and confirm the lineup via Comet FMS 30 minutes prior to kick-off for matches from Round 1 to the Semi Finals and 60 minutes prior to kick-off in the Final.
- b) Players' names must correspond with the numbers assigned on the team lineup. The Club Comet user shall be considered to verify the accuracy of the information provided on the team lineup via Comet FMS.

- c) Any club failing to provide such confirmation by the stipulated deadlines will be fined in the sum of £25 for each offence. Fines for Late Team Lineups will be administered via COMET FMS.

7 – Substitute Players

- a) A club may, at its discretion use five 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, and the referee has given permission. Substitute players shall be nominated prior to the commencement of the tie.
- b) Clubs may nominate a maximum of five substitute players, from which five substitutions shall be permitted.
- c) Substitutions may only be made on at most three occasions during the game. Exceptionally, one additional substitution stoppage window will be granted to each club should a match proceed to extra time.
- d) Substitutions made during half-time, between the end of normal playing time and the start of extra time, and at half-time during extra time do not reduce the number of stoppages in play that can be used.

8 – Replacement of Players on the Team Lineup

After the team lineups have been completed and submitted to the Comet Football Management System, and before the match has kicked off, the following shall apply:

- a) If any of the first eleven players named on the team lineup are not able to start the match due to unexpected physical incapacity, they can be replaced only by any of the five (5) substitutes named on the confirmed team lineup. The substitute(s) in question can then be replaced by a player(s) not named on the initial team lineup, so that the quota of substitutes is not reduced. During the match, five players can still be substituted. The replaced player(s) must be removed from the team lineup and not be available for selection for this fixture.
- b) If any of the five (5) substitutes named on the team lineup are not able to be fielded due to unexpected physical incapacity, they can be replaced by any player not named on the confirmed team lineup, so that the quota of substitutes is not reduced. During the match, five players can still be substituted. The replaced player(s) must be removed from the team lineup and not be available for selection for this fixture.
- c) Any amendments to the team lineup in accordance with points a) and b) above must be communicated to the opposing team manager by one of the Match Officials as soon as possible prior to the commencement of the match.

9 – Players must wear registered colours

- a) 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 home club shall change.
- b) 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.
- c) Referees shall have power to instruct a Club to change any part of its playing kit if he considers the colour not quite distinctive from that of its opponents, and the Referee shall have power to deal with any player refusing to comply with this instruction.

10 – The duration of a match

- a) 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.
- b) The referee shall have power to allow additional time for stoppages.
- c) 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.

11 – Penalties

In the event of any match resulting in a draw extra time of ten 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 penalties (penalty shoot-out) in accordance with the conditions approved by the International FA Board.

12 – Competition Draw

- a) The draw shall be made and Competition matches played as the Committee may determine, and immediately after each draw the Association will publish the result of the draw and the date on which the ties are to be played.

- b) 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.
- c) 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 clubs is obtained.
- d) 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 draw, 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, but the Committee may so arrange that four clubs compete in the semi-finals.
- e) In principle, the club that is first drawn in any ballot shall play at their registered Home venue in all matches up to and including the Quarter-Finals. If the registered ground is available it will not be necessary for the visiting team, or the Association to receive further notification, but if the match is being transferred to another ground it will be the responsibility of the team drawn at home to notify both their opponents and competitions@irishfa.com by email not later than 3 days before the match, giving clear direction to location of ground; failing which the team will be dismissed from the Competition.
- f) In the event of a match not taking place on the date arranged owing to the ground being declared unplayable by the referee and/or in the case of public grounds by the Local Authorities (including their facilities), the teams shall forthwith arrange to play the following Saturday.
- g) In the event of the match not taking place on the second Saturday due to circumstances as 12 (f) the clubs will arrange to play the following Saturday on the ground of the "Away team" and if not played on this day due to weather conditions arrangements must be made to play at the same location on the following Saturday.
- h) In the event of the match not taking place on the second attempt at the ground of the original "Away team" the tie will revert from the following Saturday to alternate weeks at the "Home" and "Away" grounds.
- i) If necessary, the Committee will permit the playing of the match at either club's registered or alternative ground if agreed in writing and confirmed to competitions@irishfa.com by both clubs at least one day prior to the match.
- j) In all cases the Secretary of the Team on whose ground a match was to be played must, immediately advise competitions@irishfa.com and their opponents of any postponement. Any club failing to conform to this rule shall be dealt with by the Junior & Youth Cup Committee who shall have power to compel the offending Club to pay such expenses or take such action as they may deem expedient.
- k) Dressing accommodation, including adequate shower facilities must be provided onsite by the Home club unless otherwise stated by Irish Football Association or Northern Ireland Executive. Any club failing to conform to this rule shall be dealt with by the Junior & Youth

Cup Committee who shall have power to compel the offending Club to pay such expenses or take such action as they may deem expedient.

- l) Matches may be played on grass or 3rd/4th generation (3G/4G) artificial turf pitches. Clubs playing their home matches on artificial turf must notify their opponents and the Association by email. Any team not adhering to this rule will be dealt with as the Committee consider appropriate.

13 – Venues for Semi Finals and Final

- a) The venue for the semi-final ties shall be decided by the Committee.
- b) The final tie may be played at the Clearer Twist National Stadium at Windsor Park unless otherwise determined by the Committee.

14 – Club Information

Each club must ensure that the following details are submitted and kept up to date on the Comet FMS:

- i. Name/Situation of Ground.
- ii. Colours of Club shirt, short and socks.
- iii. The name and contacts details of Secretary.

15 – Clubs failing to play

- a) Any club refusing or failing to play against the club against which it has been drawn on the date fixed by the Committee and without sufficient reasons for so doing, shall be adjudged to have lost the match and will be otherwise dealt with as the Committee may determine, which may include bearing the cost of pitch rental and referee expenses and exclusion from future competitions as the Committee may determine. Also, any club leaving the ground before the expiration of the game must be adjudged to have lost the match and shall be liable to be dealt with by the Committee.
- b) The Association reserves the right to implement a protocol in the event of exceptional circumstances.

16 – Notice of scratching

Any Club intending to scratch must give notice to competitions@irishfa.com and to the Secretary of the opposing Club, such notice to be received at least four days before the date of the match. Any club failing to conform to this rule shall be dealt with by the Junior & Youth Cup Committee who shall have power to compel the offending Club to pay such expenses or take such action as they may deem expedient.

17 – Match Officials

- a) In all matches the Association shall appoint the Referee, who will have the power to dispense with the services of the Assistant Referees of the clubs if they find them giving decisions at variance with the facts.
- b) The Association shall appoint Assistant Referees and 4th Officials to the Semi-Finals and Final ties.
- c) Where there is no appointed referee or where the appointed referee does not appear, the game may be refereed by a club referee (that is a qualified referee who is a member of a club) who is registered and who has paid their subscription to the Association.
- d) In the event that both teams have a qualified club referee, there shall be a coin toss, and the winner shall referee the game. The qualified club referee shall be responsible for completing the match report on the Association's Comet Football Management System.
- e) Should there be no Association appointed Referee or qualified club referee available, the fixture will be recorded as postponed.
- f) In all matches prior to the semi-finals and final it will be the responsibility of the home team to pay match officials fees and expenses on the day of the match.
- g) In the Semi-Final and Final ties, the Association shall pay the fees and expenses of the Referees, Assistant Referees, and 4th Officials.

18 – Protests

- a) Protests, along with a fee of £100, must be submitted and paid via MyComet within 2 days after the cause of the protest. The fee will be forfeited in all cases where the protest has not been sustained.
- b) Once a protest has been received the Irish FA will forward a copy of the protest to the club protested against.

- c) Protests against ineligible players must give the names of players protested against, and cause of protest.
- d) The deposit will not be returned by the Association unless the protest is upheld or withdrawn.
- e) In the case of protested Ties, or replays of same, the Committee shall decide the dates and venues. Should either Club refuse to compete such Club shall be removed from the Competition, and otherwise dealt with as the Committee may determine.

19 – 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.

20 – Agreement for Cup

- a) The original trophy, which is used for the official presentation ceremony at the final and at other official events approved by the Association, remains in the Association's keeping and ownership at all times. An alternative trophy will be provided by the Association for the winning club to keep throughout the following season.
- b) The winning club shall return the original trophy 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 winning club.

21 – Medals

The Association shall present 23 medals to playing staff and officials of both Clubs competing in the Final tie. For the avoidance of any doubt this shall include the 16 players, 6 backroom staff and the secretary of each club.

22 – Division of Receipts

In all Competition matches, with the exception of the semi-finals and Final, the Club on whose ground the match is played shall take the receipts and pay all expenses.

23 – Division of Receipts for Semi Final and Final

- a) In the semi-final ties, the receipts after all expenses are paid, shall be divided as follows: 10% to the Association and the balance divided equally amongst the competing clubs.
- b) In the Final tie, 10% of the net gate receipts to be retained by the Association and the remaining 90% to be divided equally between the two competing clubs.

24 – Committee may alter Rules

The Committee shall have power to alter these Rules, but in no case shall they do so until after the Final Tie in any year shall have been played.

25 – Powers of Committee

- a) 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 will be final (notwithstanding each club's right of appeal in accordance with the Articles of Association) and they shall have power to withhold the cup and medals or mementoes.
- b) The Committee shall have power to deal with offending Club or Clubs, player or players, official or officials, as they may think fit, and to deal with any matter not provided for in these Rules.

Note

- Sundays shall not be reckoned in the computation of time in these rules.

- NB: Terms referring to natural persons are applicable to both genders. Any term in the singular applies to the plural and vice-versa.



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