

MHSFCA  
Working Document  
Proposed 2025-2026 Football Modifications

## **Executive Summary - MIAA Football 2025 Modifications**

The goal of these modifications is to provide an equitable regular season experience for all student-athletes in football and to offer a post-season tournament for those who have demonstrated a specific level of excellence.

### **Current Concerns with the In-Season Tournament**

- Having an in-season tournament contradicts several aspects of the MIAA Tournament Philosophy. The full philosophy is on page 4, highlights are below.
  - “A tournament is justifiable only when it produces worthwhile results for all involved.”
  - “Care must be taken to maintain the integrity and importance of the regular season play so that the tournament will serve only as a culminating athletic activity for those who have demonstrated a specific level excellence during their regular season.”
- The in-season tournament format is inconsistent with other MIAA tournaments.
- The in-season tournament requires 76% (210 of 274) of the schools to alter their schedule in November by playing consolation games and/or not playing (bye-week), so other schools can participate in the tournament.
- Beginning the tournament in November creates inequitable experience for student-athletes, either welcome to the tournament or relegation to consolation games and/or bye-weeks.
- The 8-week qualifying period limits flexibility to schedule additional opponents to build a tournament worthy power rating.
- Determining the final power ratings before completing all league games, with many played on Thanksgiving, creates an imbalance, and makes it impossible to accurately seed the tournament.

### **Supporting Statistical Data from 2021-2024 16-Team Tournaments**

- The past four seasons the higher seeds have won 222 of 256 (86.7%) of the first-round games.
- The past four seasons, 91 of 256 (35.5%) teams seeded 9 through 16 have entered the tournament without a winning record. This number would be higher if we did not have the rule that requires teams to have 3 wins to be tournament eligible.
- Playing two extra games before the seeding provides 25% more opportunities for teams to build a power rating.

MHSFCA  
Working Document  
Proposed 2025-2026 Football Modifications

**Proposed Amendments for 2025-2026 Football Format**

**Shortened Regular Season, 8-Team Post-Season Tournament**

- The season will begin one week later, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday preceding Labor Day, (August 22nd)
- The pre-season practice calendar will remain the same.
- Sample calendars are included for 2025 and 2026. 2025 includes the extra 1A week.
- Schools can schedule a maximum of 10 games before the playoff seeding.
- Schools must play 8 games to be eligible for the playoffs.
- The regular season ends on Thanksgiving.
- The top eight teams per division (64 schools) qualify for the post-season.
- The MIAA Power Rating formula will determine the top 8 seeds per division.
- Teams who do not qualify for the playoffs have completed their season.
- Practices after Thanksgiving will be prohibited from having live contact.
- Playoffs begin on the Tuesday following Thanksgiving. The higher seeds will host the quarterfinal game, unless they lack lights and/or field is ruled unplayable.
- The Semi-Final will be played the Sunday following the quarterfinal at neutral site.
- The Super Bowls will be held on the second Saturday following Thanksgiving.

**Supporting Data for an 8 Team Playoff**

- Currently 210 schools (77%) are required to play a consolation game(s) or a take a bye(s) in November (week 9 & 10) so an additional 64 schools (23.2%) can qualify for the tournament.
- The past four seasons 98 (38%) of the 256 teams seeded 9 through 16 entered the tournament without a winning record. This number would be higher if we did not have the rule that requires teams to win 3 games to be tournament eligible.
- The past four seasons only 34 (13%) of the 256 teams seeded 9 through 16 won a first round tournament game.

**Recommendation**

- A study should be done to review the adjusting the start of each athletic season (Fall, Winter, Spring) one week later. This would be a benefit to football and spring sports, and it would not hinder any other sport or season.

**MHSFCA**  
**Working Document**  
**Proposed 2025-2026 Football Modifications**

**Supporting Rationale**

- The plan provides an equitable experience for all student-athletes in football.
- The plan maintains the integrity and importance of the regular season.
- The plan eliminates consolation games and by weeks for 210 of the 274 football schools in November.
- The tournament will serve only as culminating athletic activity for those who have demonstrated a specific level of excellence during their regular season.
- The plan enhances the accuracy of the power rating formula by increasing the number of games played (25%) and completing all league/rivalry games before seeding the tournament.
- Adjusting the start of the season to a week later keeps the length of the season the same.
- The plan creates early season opportunities for new regional rivalries to be developed as recommended in the Statewide Tournament Plan.
- This is a proven post-season tournament format used in Connecticut (CIAC), who also plays on Thanksgiving, since 2010.
- The plan will allow league games to be played toward the end of the season, thus keeping athletes engaged as the season develops.
- Thanksgiving will once again be the pinnacle of the season for all schools. It will also provide additional motivation for potential playoff teams, opponents of prospective playoff teams, and the communities of these schools.
- Teams in the state finals will no longer have a reason not to play their best players on Thanksgiving.
- The plan allows schools to schedule all levels of the football program prior to the start of the season. Schools will no longer have to wait for the Sunday regional consolation meeting (weeks 9 & 10) to find out their next opponent and will not need to schedule different opponents for sub-varsity teams.
- The plan removes the administrative burden of hosting regional consolation meetings.
- Only teams with a winning record will qualify for the tournament.
- Half of the playoff qualifiers (32 Teams or 12% of the teams) will be eliminated on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving.

**Drawbacks**

- The 16 teams (5.8% of the schools who play football) who reach the State Final will miss an additional week of the winter season.

MHSFCA  
Working Document  
Proposed 2025-2026 Football Modifications

MIAA Handbook July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2025

## PART IX: TOURNAMENTS

### 93. MIAA Tournament Philosophy

The MIAA strongly supports the commitment to interscholastic athletic programs as an essential educational opportunity for students. Young people develop physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially through voluntary participation in properly conducted athletic programs, including tournaments. The development of self-image, character, stamina, physical skills, achievement, self-discipline, and the desire to excel are all advantages associated with high school sport participation.

The educational value of tournaments has long been recognized by secondary school educators. High school tournaments are conducted in all 50 states in widely different sports for teams and individuals, and for all student-athletes. Enthusiasm for tournaments extends beyond those student-athletes who qualify for these championship activities. Tournament excitement is often a focal point for school-community cohesiveness. For the participants, tournaments provide for an intensity in preparation and a greater level of skill attainment which causes, even beyond the high school years, a better capacity for facing adversity, discouragement, and the vicissitudes of life.

The purpose of tournaments is to permit qualifying schools and individuals who represent that school team and who have achieved an established standard of excellence during that sport season to compete in championship tournaments. Tournaments demonstrate success and should serve as an incentive for others. They should provide students and spectators an opportunity, under competitive conditions, to develop desirable character traits.

Tournaments have the potential to inspire maximum performance, provide quality competition, afford high visibility for all concerned, and foster personal development.

All tournaments must be carefully planned and controlled. A tournament is justifiable only when it produces worthwhile results for all involved. Schools, teams, coaches, and spectators must display good sportsmanship in winning or losing. Negative behavior must not be tolerated.

Care must be taken to maintain the integrity and importance of regular season play so that the tournament will serve only as a culminating athletic activity for those who have demonstrated a specific level of excellence during their regular season.

# MHSFCA Working Document Proposed 2025-2026 Football Modifications

## 2025 Calendar

|                                  | SUNDAY          | MONDAY         | TUESDAY            | WEDNESDAY     | THURSDAY           | FRIDAY             | SATURDAY                               |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|--------------------|--|
| <b>2025</b>                      |                 |                |                    |               |                    |                    |  |
| <b>August</b><br>Preseason       |                 |                |                    |               | 21                 | 22<br>Helmets      | 23<br>Helmets                          |
| <b>August</b><br>Preseason       | 24<br>Off Day   | 25<br>Helmets  | 26<br>Uppers       | 27<br>Uppers  | 28<br>Full Pads    | 29<br>Full Pads    | 30<br>practice                         |
| <b>September</b><br>Preseason    | 31<br>Off Day   | 1<br>Labor Day | 2<br>practice      | 3<br>practice | 4<br>practice      | 5<br>practice      | 6<br>practice                          |
| <b>September</b><br>Week 1A      | 7<br>Off Day    | 8              | 9                  | 10            | 11                 | 12                 | 13<br>Game Week                        |
| <b>September</b><br>Week 1       | 14              | 15             | 16                 | 17            | 18                 | 19                 | 20<br>Game Week                        |
| <b>September</b><br>Week 2       | 21              | 22             | 23                 | 24            | 25                 | 26                 | 27<br>Game Week                        |
| <b>October</b><br>Week 3         | 28              | 29             | 30                 | 1             | 2                  | 3                  | 4<br>Game Week                         |
| <b>October</b><br>Week 4         | 5               | 6              | 7                  | 8             | 9                  | 10                 | 11<br>Game Week                        |
| <b>October</b><br>Week 5         | 12              | 13             | 14                 | 15            | 16                 | 17                 | 18<br>Game Week                        |
| <b>October</b><br>Week 6         | 19              | 20             | 21                 | 22            | 23                 | 24                 | 25<br>Game Week                        |
| <b>October</b><br>Week 7         | 26              | 27             | 28                 | 29            | 30                 | 31                 | 1<br>Game Week                         |
| <b>November</b><br>Week 8        | 2               | 3              | 4                  | 5             | 6                  | 7                  | 8<br>Game Week                         |
| <b>November</b><br>Week 9        | 9               | 10             | 11                 | 12            | 13                 | 14                 | 15<br>Game Week                        |
| <b>November</b><br>Week 10       | 16              | 17             | 18                 | 19            | 20                 | 21                 | 22<br>Game if not Playing Thanksgiving |
| <b>November</b><br>Week 11       | 23              | 24             | 25                 | 26            | 27<br>Thanksgiving | 28                 | 29                                     |
| <b>2025 Post-Season Calendar</b> |                 |                |                    |               |                    |                    |  |
| <b>December</b><br>Post-Season   | 30              | 1              | 2<br>Quarterfinals | 3             | 4                  | 5                  | 6                                      |
| <b>December</b><br>Post-Season   | 7<br>Semifinals | 8              | 9                  | 10            | 11                 | 12<br>State Finals | 13                                     |

**MHSFCA**  
**Working Document**  
**Proposed 2025-2026 Football Modifications**

**2026 Calendar**

| <b>2026</b>                    | <b>SUNDAY</b>   | <b>MONDAY</b>  | <b>TUESDAY</b>     | <b>WEDNESDAY</b> | <b>THURSDAY</b>    | <b>FRIDAY</b>                                | <b>SATURDAY</b> |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|--|-----------------|
| <b>August</b><br>Preseason     |                 |                |                    |                  | 27                 | 28<br>Helmets                                | 29<br>Helmets   |
| <b>August</b><br>Preseason     | 30<br>Off Day   | 31<br>Helmets  | 1<br>Uppers        | 2<br>Uppers      | 3<br>Full Pads     | 4<br>Full Pads                               | 5<br>practice   |
| <b>September</b><br>Preseason  | 6<br>Off Day    | 7<br>Labor Day | 8<br>practice      | 9<br>practice    | 10<br>practice     | 11<br>practice                               | 12<br>practice  |
| <b>September</b><br>Week 1     | 13<br>Off Day   | 14             | 15                 | 16               | 17                 | 18<br>19<br>Game Week                        |                 |
| <b>September</b><br>Week 2     | 20              | 21             | 22                 | 23               | 24                 | 25<br>26<br>Game Week                        |                 |
| <b>October</b><br>Week 3       | 27              | 28             | 29                 | 30               | 1                  | 2<br>3<br>Game Week                          |                 |
| <b>October</b><br>Week 4       | 4               | 5              | 6                  | 7                | 8                  | 9<br>10<br>Game Week                         |                 |
| <b>October</b><br>Week 5       | 11              | 12             | 13                 | 14               | 15                 | 16<br>17<br>Game Week                        |                 |
| <b>October</b><br>Week 6       | 18              | 19             | 20                 | 21               | 22                 | 23<br>24<br>Game Week                        |                 |
| <b>October</b><br>Week 7       | 25              | 26             | 27                 | 28               | 29                 | 30<br>31<br>Game Week                        |                 |
| <b>November</b><br>Week 8      | 1               | 2              | 3                  | 4                | 5                  | 6<br>7<br>Game Week                          |                 |
| <b>November</b><br>Week 9      | 8               | 9              | 10                 | 11               | 12                 | 13<br>14<br>Game Week                        |                 |
| <b>November</b><br>Week 10     | 15              | 16             | 17                 | 18               | 19                 | 20<br>21<br>Game if not playing Thanksgiving |                 |
| <b>November</b><br>Week 11     | 22              | 23             | 24                 | 25               | 26<br>Thanksgiving | 27   | 28              |
| Post-Season                    |                 |                |                    |                  |                    |  |                 |
| <b>December</b><br>Post-Season | 29              | 30             | 1<br>Quarterfinals | 2                | 3                  | 4  | 5               |
| <b>December</b><br>Post-Season | 6<br>Semifinals | 7              | 8                  | 9                | 10                 | 11<br>State Finals                           | 12              |