

MIAA Football Committee

Sub-Committee Working Document

Proposed 2025-2026 Football Modifications

Executive Summary - MIAA Football 2025 Modifications

The goal of this proposal is to provide a more equitable experience for the student-athletes in the sport of football and to offer a post-season tournament for the teams who demonstrate a specific level of excellence during the regular season. The proposed modifications put more emphasis on the regular season for the 275 MIAA schools participating in football, still reward the top performing teams, and aim to make the football tournament format align closer to the intended benefits of the MIAA Statewide Tournament Plan.

After years of the MIAA offering regional post-season tournaments for football, a statewide playoff plan was adopted. The State Football Playoff was approved, after much debate, by a vote of the MIAA membership in 2013. The State Football Playoff, like other MIAA tournaments at the time, operated under a sectional format. The debate centered on the requirement of starting the tournament before the completion of the regular season since it required four rounds to be completed before Thanksgiving. While the 2013 State Football Playoff plan accomplished many of its stated goals it still had some drawbacks including but not limited to: 1) the inability to place Central and Western area schools into the correct divisions, 2) different regional qualifying methods, 3) sub-500 teams qualifying and 4) the necessity to establishment of consolation games.

In 2021, the MIAA reevaluated all sport tournaments and introduced the Statewide Tournament. The Statewide Tournament addressed all sports, and it did in fact correct some of the flaws of the 2013 State Football Playoff plan. The most notable improvements were the creation of statewide divisions to align teams by enrollment and the development of a proprietary power-rating formula to qualify and seed teams. Nevertheless, several drawbacks remained. The most significant concern is the number of consolation games being played and the effect it is having on football programs across the state. This past season, 211 (76.7%) schools were required to play at least one consolation game and/or take a bye so an additional 64 teams (8 in each division) could qualify for the tournament.

Using a format that relies on consolation games to complete the regular season continues to have a negative effect on teams who do not qualify and/or are eliminated in the first round of the tournament. Examples include, 27 schools electing to take a bye last November, while one school was forced to take a bye when no opponent could be found. Additionally, several athletic directors recently submitted a rule change proposal (#21) to allow the length of consolation games to be reduced. Some of the reasons stated in the proposal include difficulty finding local matchups, to reduce transportation costs, and "these games are for friendly competition and do not count towards anything". Multiple members of this committee, who coach, have expressed concerns about the mental health of student-athletes once they are subject to consolation games and have experienced players leaving the team instead of playing consolation games. Finally, in a 2021 MHSFCA survey about possible tournament formats, the head coaches in the state selected the format without consolation games by an overwhelming percentage.

A study of the 2021 and 2022 football tournaments reveals having a 16-team tournament in each

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division also has drawbacks for the teams who qualify seeded 9-16. Surprisingly 33%, 43 of the 128 teams (64 each season) rewarded with a tournament berth seeded 9 to 16 did not have a winning record. The number of teams qualifying without a winning record would be larger, 48% (61 teams), if the rule requiring teams to have three wins was not in place. In this two-year period, the lower seeded teams have not had much success, winning only 16 of 128 games (12.5%) of first round games with the average margin of defeat in these games greater than 21 points.

Based on this information and the additional data provided in the rationale of the modifications, now is the time to put the focus back on providing the student-athletes' an equitable experience, while still offering a tournament for the top performing teams. This proposal solves the issues discussed and highlights the numerous benefits of changing the format back to a post-season tournament. The highlights include but are not limited to, all teams complete the regular season before the start of tournament, ensuring the path to a championship is equal, and improving accuracy of each team's power rating. The compromise is that fewer teams will qualify for the tournament and 16 teams will need an additional week to complete the season.

Most agree these modifications will improve the experience of student-athletes in the sport of football. The rationale behind the modifications is strong, the objectives are consistent with other sport formats and align with the benefits of the MIAA Statewide Tournament Plan. However, it will require some compromise and adjustment from the long-standing structure of the one-week post-season in football. In the last three plus years everyone has learned to adapt, modify, and reflect due to issues such as the pandemic, inflation, and social injustice to name a few. The MIAA and the membership have adjusted as well with the introduction of the MIAA Statewide Tournament and most recently the Competitive Equity Tool. These changes are designed to provide equality and opportunity. We seek your support, so we can begin to work with other MIAA committees to navigate a path to provide equality to all and a tournament to the high achievers in high school football.

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Proposal for 2025-2026 Football Format

11 Game Regular Season, 8-Team Post-Season

- The calendar for the pre-season will remain the same.
- The calendar for the regular season will be the same.
- Schools can schedule up to 11 games including Thanksgiving during the regular season.
- Schools must play 9 games to be playoff eligible.
- Schools must take a bye either week 11 (week before Thanksgiving) or Week 12 (Thanksgiving week).
- Schools who do not play on Thanksgiving can schedule a game during week 11. *Calendar on page 3*
- The MIAA Power Rating formula will determine the top 8 seeds per division. Only 64 schools (23% of the teams) will qualify for the post-season.
- Practices after Thanksgiving will be prohibited from having live contact.
- The quarterfinals will be on the Tuesday night after Thanksgiving (5 days later) The higher seeded school will host unless their field does not meet the established standards.
- The Semi-Finals will be played Sunday (5 days later) at a neutral site.
- The Super Bowl will be the following Saturday (6 Days) at a neutral site.

Recommendation for Equal Path

- Consider limiting each division to a maximum of 40 teams. This will ensure the top 20% of schools in each division will qualify for the tournament.

Statistical Data

- Currently 211 schools (76.7%) are required to play a consolation game(s) or a take a bye(s) in November (weeks 9 & 10) so an additional 64 schools (23.2%) can qualify for the tournament.
- In the past two seasons 44 (34.4%) of the 128 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.
- In the past two seasons only 16 (12.5%) of the 128 additional teams seeded 9 through 16 won a first round tournament game.
 - Five (31.3%) of the 16 first round upsets in the last two years occurred in division eight which is the largest division.

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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 byes for 211 of the 275 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 format aligns with other team sports and follows the normal athletic experience MIAA student-athletes are accustomed to, a regular season and a post-season, if you qualify.
- The plan enhances the accuracy of the power rating formula by increasing the number of games played and completing all league/rivalry games before seeding the tournament.
- The plan allows schools to schedule non-league games to fit the level of the program.
- 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.

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11 Game Regular Season
 8-Team Post-Season Tournament

2025 Proposed Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Week 9 2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Week 10 9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Week 11 2nd Bye Week 16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Week 12 2nd Bye Week 23	24	25	26 Thanksgiving Eve	27 Thanksgiving Day (last possible game)	28	29
Week 13 30	December 1	2 Quarterfinals	3	4	5	6
Week 14 Semi-Finals 7	8	9	10	11	12	13 Super Bowls