

NIWFA LEAGUE RULES

1 MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1** Membership of the NIWFA shall be granted to a club who satisfy the NIWFA committee at interview, they have the capability to participate in NIWFA League and Cup competitions. The committee must be satisfied, a prospective club has sufficient player numbers, facilities, staff and finance. The committee will also take into account the effect on established local clubs already in membership. This will also apply to any affiliated club wishing to register an additional team. Any additional team will have to satisfy the NIWFA Committee via the same process, and the same criteria will be applied.
- 1.2** Any club already in membership, who fundamentally changes their identity, will be deemed a new club and will be required to undergo the above process. A change of identity may be considered to have occurred where a club changes legal title, name, playing location, playing colours, club badge, is incorporated into or amalgamates with another club.
- 1.3** No club shall be deemed in membership of the NIWFA until all registration documents have been accepted, they have affiliated to their respective Divisional Association and the required fees have been paid. Documentation and fees are required to be paid by 7th February each year.
- 1.4** No club shall be permitted to participate in any competition under the auspices of the NIWFA if 1.3 has not been complied with. (Required documentation and fees are listed in NIWFA Tariffs.)
- 1.5** Membership of the NIWFA shall constitute an agreement between the NIWFA and each club to be bound by and comply with FIFA Regulations, UEFA Statutes, the Rules and Articles of the Irish Football Association, NIWFA Rules, the Laws of the Game, and the Rules and Regulations of any body of which the NIWFA is a member.
- 1.6** The NIWFA Committee has the power to deal with all matters pertaining to the running of the NIWFA league, including decisions about the make-up and formation of leagues, while taking into account sporting merit and registered teams.

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2 GENERAL

- 2.1** All clubs are required to pay a good behaviour bond upon acceptance to the NIWFA. The bond will only be returned to the club should it leave the league, and they have no outstanding fines or debts. The bond will not be returned to any club who is expelled from the league for any reason.
- 2.2** Each club must register with the NIWFA the full address of their home venue, to be approved by the NIWFA. It is expected that the changing rooms shall be adjacent to the pitch, and away teams should be informed if this is not so. It is the responsibility of clubs to notify alterations to the NIWFA Secretary immediately.
- 2.3** Member Clubs can make proposals for changes to either Rules and / or Constitution at an Annual General Meeting by following the procedures as laid out in the Constitution.
- 2.4** The NIWFA Committee by a majority vote shall have the power to deal with any club(s), player(s), official(s) or supporters who have breached the Code of Conduct, or whose conduct, in their opinion has been objectionable or detrimental to the best interests of any competition or to Association football in general. Breach of the Code of Conduct will be deemed a disciplinary offence and will be subject to any sanctions deemed appropriate by the NIWFA Committee.
- 2.5** The NIWFA Committee shall decide grounds suitable for staging finals of competitions organised by the league.
- 2.6** All Clubs must send a representative to physical or electronic platform NIWFA meetings as arranged. Failure to do so will result in a fine as determined by the Committee.
- 2.7** It shall be the responsibility of winning clubs to return their cups to the Association on or before team registration each season (or earlier if so requested by the Association). Winning clubs shall return cups in good or like condition and shall be liable for any costs in the event that cups are destroyed, stolen, lost, or damaged whilst in the possession of the club. The Registered Secretary and one other club official will be expected to sign for any trophy, acknowledging receipt and the conditions attached to retention.
- 2.8** All clubs must register Managers, Coaches and Officials (Chair, Secretary and Treasurer), who may be subject to a vetting procedure. It is the responsibility of clubs to notify alterations to the NIWFA Secretary immediately, and attention is drawn to the responsibilities and obligations on registered officials in these rules. Each club must have a club email address for league correspondence, accessible by more than one club official.
- 2.9** Each team in the league shall register its colours and alternative colours with the league secretary.
- 2.10** Clubs with two or more teams competing in the NIWFA League must maintain the status of the team playing at the highest level. Should a club be unable to sustain two teams the team playing in the lower division will be removed from the NIWFA.
- 2.11** All clubs shall retain their own gate receipts.

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2.12 The Committee shall have power to deal with any matter not provided for in these Rules.

2.13 If a club has more than one team competing in the NIWFA League, then any player who is named in the starting 11 in a league match for any Team will be ineligible to play in the next league match(es) for any Team playing at a lower level, until after the Team at the higher level has played again.

2.14 Two teams from the same club will not be permitted to play in the same NIWFA division. A team will be denied promotion if its First Team is in the division above. Similarly, when a First Team is relegated to a lower division of which its Second Team is a member, the Second Team must accept relegation to the next lowest division, and should the First team be relegated to the lowest division, its Second Team automatically retires from the league.

2.15 Youth or Reserve teams of clubs competing in leagues other than NIWFA will only be considered for admission to the NIWFA league if their first team competed in the NIWFA league in the preceding 3 seasons. The Youth/Reserve team will not be eligible for promotion within the NIWFA league beyond Division 1. The principle of Rule 2.13 will also apply to a non-NIWFA First Team and an NIWFA Second Team.

2.16 A match can be recorded for training and development purposes. The footage cannot be shared on any online platform without the written agreement of both clubs.

3 RANKING OF TEAMS

3.1 Each club shall play home and away fixtures in NIWFA League competitions. All matches shall be played under the rules and regulations of the Irish Football Association and of the NIWFA and in accordance with the Laws of the Game.

3.2 Teams shall be awarded 3 points for a win, 1 point for a draw and 0 points for a defeat.

3.3 At the end of the respective NIWFA League championship the club scoring the largest number of points shall be declared the champion club of the league.

In the case of equality of points teams shall be ranked in accordance with the following criteria:

- i. Superior points gained in matches between the teams in question;
- ii. Aggregate score in head to head matches
- iii. Highest goals scored in all league matches
- iv. Least goals conceded in all league matches

Should equality still be the case at the end of the process above, the NIWFA will host a 'play off' match to determine the Champion club.

This process will also apply to decide matters of relegation and play-off positions where two clubs complete the season on equal points.

3.4 Promotion and Relegation via sporting merit shall apply between the NIWFA Divisions, except for an NIWFA Reserve League. Where the Reserve league has more than one Division, the same principles shall apply as in the Premier/Championship.

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- 3.5** Subject to a qualifying club meeting the NIFL licensing criteria and application process, and subject to agreement by NIFL and NIWFA, Promotion and Relegation between the NIFL Premiership and NIWFA Championship League will be determined and communicated before the commencement of the incoming competitive season.
- 3.6** Promotion and Relegation between the NIWFA divisions will be, in principle, on the following basis:
- i. The bottom two clubs in the higher NIWFA division shall be relegated
 - ii. Champion and runner-up Clubs in the lower division will be promoted.
- 3.7** If required, NIWFA Promotion/Relegation play-offs shall take place at a venue(s) determined by the league committee before 30 September.
- 3.8** Where promotion/relegation or team(s) withdrawing from the league results in an imbalance in divisions, the NIWFA reserves the right to fill vacancies as required, subject to the principle of sporting merit.

4 MATCHES

- 4.1** Matches may be played on natural turf or artificial turf, provided that such artificial turf meets the "FIFA Standard".
- 4.2** All matches shall be played under the Laws of the Game as approved by the International Football Association Board and in accordance with the Articles and Rules of the IFA and also of the NIWFA. All NIWFA League matches shall be played on the dates scheduled at the commencement of the season, except:
- i. When otherwise directed by the NIWFA; or when
 - ii. A club requests the deferral of a fixture for exceptional circumstances and this is agreed by the NIWFA
 - iii. National Cup and/or Divisional Association Cup ties take precedence
 - iv. A club is competing in a UEFA tournament
 - v. International match exemptions apply, as per Rule 4.4
 - vi. A club has requested a "Free Date" (where the term free date refers to the actual match date and the fixture may be played on an alternative date) by agreeing a new date with their opposing team not later than 28 days from the original date, and notifying the Fixtures Secretary (or Deputy) and the opposing team by email, giving a minimum of two weeks' notice and providing the new agreed date. Clubs will only be permitted one free date.
- 4.3** Matches shall not be played out of sequence unless with the prior approval of the NIWFA Fixtures Secretary or Deputy.
- 4.4** No league/cup fixtures will take place when the International Women's teams are playing at home. Moreover, in accordance with the IFA's Football Regulation 36(d) – No games shall be played which commence less than five hours prior to the kick off of an 'A' International or a competitive U21 International match, where the same are played in Northern Ireland, or (in the town or city in which it is being played) an Irish Cup Semi-Final or Final, excepting with the express permission of the Football Committee.

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- 4.5** In the event of a home club having to change from their registered venue, they must notify their opponents registered Secretary, the NIWFA Fixtures Secretary and Referee Coordinator not less than 24 hours prior to the scheduled kick off time of the game. Clubs failing to comply with this rule shall be fined a sum of £100 and shall forfeit three points, such points shall be accredited to the opposing team and a score line of 3 goals to nil awarded to their opponents.
- 4.6** In the event of a club failing to fulfil an arranged fixture, they must notify their opponents registered Secretary, the NIWFA Fixtures Secretary and Referee Coordinator not less than 24 hours prior to the scheduled kick off time of the game. The NIWFA Committee, upon investigation, shall be empowered to order compensation be made to the other club for actual expenses incurred for such a match. Such club shall also be fined as per NIWFA Tariffs. The Fixtures Secretary shall register a three nil score line in favour of the opponent team. In addition, the offending team will be deducted 3 points. A club failing to fulfil an arranged match for a third time in the same season shall be dismissed from membership of the NIWFA.
- 4.7** Postponed matches shall be played on a date not later than 28 days from the original scheduled date. The home club must reach agreement with their opponent and notify the NIWFA Fixtures Secretary and Referee Co-Coordinator within 72 hours of the original scheduled kick-off, or if postponement is due to application of Rule 4.2 iii then any re-scheduling must be confirmed within 5 working days of the date of the Cup Draw. If no agreement is notified to the NIWFA Fixtures Secretary and Referee Co-Coordinator within the time limit the NIWFA will impose a date.
- ‘Postponed’ means:
- i. The fixture is postponed due to a ground being declared “unplayable” by a qualified referee or ground provider. Any home club unable to obtain a ground call-off pitch decision that can be confirmed by a governing authority may call for a “pitch Inspection” by calling on the referees’ coordinator. The club will be directly responsible for any referees fees and expenses.
 - ii. The fixture is postponed by the Senior or parent association or local authority.
 - iii. A club requests postponement of their scheduled fixtures during the period of release of (i) their goalkeeper or (ii) two or more players who have been selected to represent their National Association representative team. In such circumstances, the club requesting the postponement must notify the Referee Coordinator, the Fixtures Secretary and the opposing team by email no less than 48 hours before the fixture was due to take place. Failure to do so will result in any additional costs incurred becoming liable to the club.
- 4.8** All NIWFA matches shall be of 90 mins duration - 45 minutes each way with a half time break no longer than 15 mins. All mid-season matches shall have a common start time of 7.30pm. For early and late season matches, as directed by the Fixtures Secretary at the start of the season, matches shall start at 7pm unless floodlights are available. The home team shall supply a minimum of two match balls and a whistle and ensure there are appropriate nets on the goals and corner flags. Should the start time require modification, agreement should be reached between the respective clubs and both clubs shall notify the NIWFA Fixtures Secretary and Referee Coordinator no less than 48 hours prior to the scheduled kick off time.
- 4.9** Should a team not turn up in “Reasonable Time”, they shall forfeit their fixture and the points shall be awarded to the opposing club, subject to NIWFA Committee agreement. “Reasonable

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Time” should be understood to mean that the kick-off time will not be delayed more than 20 minutes after the fixed starting time.

- 4.10** Any match not completed may be ordered to stand as a completed fixture, if a minimum of 70 minutes have been completed or the unfinished time may be ordered to be played, or the fixture ordered to be replayed in its entirety.
- 4.11** Where any match is subject to an abandonment and subsequent disciplinary investigation by the IFA or Divisional Association, the NIWFA reserve the power to await the outcome of any such investigation prior to taking any action it deems fit surrounding the playing of, the result of and the clubs involved in the match.
- 4.12** Any Clubs involved in a game that is ordered to be replayed will be jointly responsible for the cost of the venue and officials, except where the NIWFA direct otherwise.
- 4.13** The player’s shirts must be clearly numbered on the back and must correspond exactly with the IFA Football Management System match line-up before any match under the jurisdiction of the NIWFA, and the team captain shall wear a distinguishing armband to indicate this.
- 4.14** Each club shall input their team line-up including the full names of players and club officials taking part in each match (including the names of the nominated substitutes) via the IFA Football Management System 15 minutes prior to kick off.
- Should a match venue not have a data signal, secretaries or other responsible persons acting for competing clubs shall notify the referee of these details in writing, prior to kick-off.
- 4.15** Breaches of team line-up rules may be subject to an appropriate sanction as the NIWFA deems appropriate.
- 4.16** Results will only be recognised on receipt of the official notification from the referee that the match has been played. It is the responsibility of the referee to submit the result notification, goal scorers, substitutions, discipline and POTM for each team on the IFA Football Management System to the NIWFA within 24 hours. Referees shall submit any cautions, dismissals or reports to the Divisional Association or IFA as appropriate.
- 4.17** Any team not wearing their registered Home/Away kit (as appropriate) must notify their opposition in writing five days in advance. In the event of the two (2) teams having the same colours, the Home Team must change.
- 4.18** In all fixtures under the auspices of the NIWFA the home club shall be responsible for all expenses including the referee’s fee and travelling expenses. This does not apply to teams deemed the home club in matches the NIWFA has responsibility for hosting.
- 4.19** Where a team is unable or unwilling to complete an allocated fixture programme either through suspension, expulsion or any other reason, their record to date will be removed from the league. The club will be deemed relegated from their division.

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- 4.20** All league matches must be played before Cup Finals week, unless NIWFA Committee approval has been given.
- 4.21** The Fixtures Secretary may refer any request for a fixture postponement back to the Committee for consideration if they deem the request to be frivolous in nature. Where it is proven that a club has attempted to misuse NIWFA rules for their benefit they shall be subject to a sanction as determined by members of the Committee who have no conflict of interest in the league or competition under consideration.

5 PLAYER REGISTRATIONS

Player Registration/Eligibility Guidelines

- 5.1** All players must be registered in accordance with the IFA Amateur Game Player Registration Regulations and the NIWFA Player Registration/Eligibility Guidelines.
- 5.2** In accordance with IFA Football Regulation 29, a player shall only be eligible to play competitive football in an NIWFA league or cup competition if they will be at least 16 years old by the end of the current playing season, i.e. 31 October.
- 5.3** Only amateur players are permitted to play in the NIWFA League. The NIWFA does not permit the 'loan' of players
- 5.4** No player may register for more than one club at a time. Any player completing a registration via the IFA Football Management System for more than one club will be investigated and dealt with by the NIWFA Committee and/or the IFA.
- 5.5** All player registrations must be submitted via the IFA Football Management System by the Club Registrar, prior to 12 noon the day before the scheduled kick off time of a game the player intends to play in.
- 5.5a** No NIWFA club may transfer (either directly or indirectly) more than 2 players from any other NIWFA club in any season.
- 5.6** Any player whose registration was last held outside of the IFA's jurisdiction requires an International Transfer Certificate as outlined in the FIFA Regulations governing the Status and Transfer of Players, before they can play in any NIWFA competition.
- 5.7** Players may be registered with a maximum of three clubs during one season. During this period, the player is only eligible to play official matches for two clubs. As an exception to this rule, a player moving between two clubs belonging to different national associations with overlapping seasons (i.e. start of the season in autumn/winter as opposed to spring/summer) may be eligible to play in official matches for a third club during the relevant season.

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- 5.8** Player Registrations will only be accepted on or after 1st March in any season and no player may be registered after 7th August in any season. The only exception to this is the emergency registration of a goalkeeper, with NIWFA Committee approval, or the registration of players from a club which has left the league as per Rule 4.20. A player must register each season.
- 5.9** A player will be deemed to have 'played' when they have actively taken part in a game from the start or entered the field of play as a substitute.

Player Ineligibility

- 5.10** Failure to comply with any of the conditions relating to a registration will render the player ineligible to play for the club concerned as not being a bona-fide player.
- 5.11** Any player who is sent off or dismissed in any NIWFA match shall automatically be suspended for the club's next official fixture. It is the responsibility of each club to ensure their players and officials serve any automatic suspension. The Irish Football Association or the respective Divisional Association will advise of any fine and/or further suspension.
- 5.12** Any club playing an ineligible player or players (whether through non-registration, suspension or otherwise) in any match under the jurisdiction of the NIWFA shall be fined as follows: £50 for the first offence and £10 for each subsequent offence. This shall apply to each and every player breaching this rule.
- 5.13** The offending team will forfeit the match(es) in question, and a score line of three nil shall be recorded in favour of their opponents. The offending team will also be deducted 3 points. Notwithstanding the above, the winning team shall not be disadvantaged if the original score line was of greater benefit to that team's goal difference.
- 5.14** Should both clubs play an ineligible player or players in any match under the auspices of the NIWFA then both clubs will be fined, in a sum of £50 per player for the first offence and £10 for subsequent offences involving the same player. In addition, both clubs will be deducted 3 points for the fixture, and both clubs shall have a minus three (-3) goal difference recorded against them.
- 5.15** Nothing in these Regulations shall entitle the NIWFA to deduct points or impose fines for registration offences committed by any club during any previous season. This means that the NIWFA Committee will not hear any player eligibility complaints outside of the registration period in each season.
- 5.16** For the purpose of all NIWFA regulations, a season will be deemed to start on the 1st March and end on 31st October in each year, as per IFA Articles of Association.

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Substitute Players

- 5.17** A club may at its discretion use five substitute players at any time in any match, except to replace a player who has been suspended from the game by the Referee. The substitutions can be made in accordance with the Laws of the Game.
- 5.18** Only five substitutions by each side will be permitted in any match, and clubs may nominate up to a maximum of seven substitute players prior to the commencement of the match.
- 5.19** Substitutions may only be made at most 3 occasions during the game (excluding half-time).
- 5.20** Exceptionally, a sixth substitute may take part exclusively during extra time in any play off or League Cup fixture.
- 5.21** Should any nominated player or substitute sustain an injury or become otherwise incapacitated after the submission of the team sheet to the referee and before the kick-off she may be replaced, provided that the referee and the opposing club are informed prior to kick-off.

6 REFEREES

- 6.1** A referee is entitled to the relevant rate of match fee and travelling expenses of agreed rate per mile, as specified by the IFA.
- 6.2** Match fees or expenses must be paid by the home team.
- 6.3** Any club failing to fulfil the above rule will be considered to have committed an offence and will be dealt with by the NIWFA Committee.
- 6.4** Any club who feels that a referee has exaggerated any claim for expenses should immediately notify the IFA, c/o Referees Committee, so the matter can be fully investigated.
- 6.5** When a referee declares a ground unplayable, or attends a fixture that is not fulfilled, she/he shall receive expenses as follows: - half match fees and full travel expenses, all to be paid by the home team.
- 6.6** The referee's decision is final as to whether a ground is playable.
- 6.7** Should the official referee fail to turn up, the clubs shall decide upon a qualified club referee, who is currently registered with an affiliated referee association. Such fixture shall stand as a competitive match. Should there be no official referee nor qualified club referee available, the fixture will not stand as a competitive game, and the match will be recorded as postponed.
- 6.8** The NIWFA Committee will appoint a referee co-ordinator(s). Referees will be allocated fixtures by a referee co-ordinator(s) within the NIWFA Committee and only properly affiliated referees will be utilised.
- 6.9** The Referees' Co-ordinator will nominate the officials to be considered for all NIWFA finals, play-offs, etc. and the NIWFA Committee will have the final decision in the appointments for these games.

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7 NIWFA CUP COMPETITION

The NIWFA Committee shall organise one cup competition for each Division, where league timescales permit. The NIWFA Committee may organise other cup competitions, if and when it perceives this to be necessary.

- 7.1** Any club refusing or failing to play the club against which it is drawn on the date fixed by the NIWFA Committee without sufficient reasons for doing so, shall be adjudged to have lost the tie and will be subject to a non-fulfilment fine as per NIWFA Tariffs..
- 7.2** All NIWFA Cup matches will be 45 minutes duration each half with a maximum 15 mins for half time.
- 7.3** In the event of a drawn game at any stage of the competitions, extra time of two periods of 10 minutes will be played and if still drawn at the end of extra time, kicks from the penalty mark shall be taken in accordance with the Laws of the Game to decide the winner. In the case of insufficient light the referee is permitted to go straight to penalty kicks rather than attempt to play extra time. All Cup Matches must be played to a finish.
- 7.4** All players must be registered in accordance with the IFA Amateur Game Player Registration Regulations and the NIWFA Player Registration/Eligibility Guidelines.
- 7.5** A player shall not be permitted to play for more than one team in any same league cup competition, nor to play in more than one league cup competition in each season. Players must be eligible to play for their club in league matches to qualify for cup competition matches. Any registered player who participates in a NIFL League Cup competition shall not be permitted to play in any NIWFA Cup competitions.
- 7.6** In cup draws no team shall receive a “bye” in more than one round of any knock-out competitions. A team may also not receive a “bye” into the semi-final/ final unless through a team being suspended from the cup competition or expelled from the NIWFA or there being only four entrants.
- 7.7** NIWFA Cup Matches may not be postponed except under Rule 4.7. In the event of a match being postponed, the match must be played on or before the following Monday, at the same venue.
- 7.7a** In the event of a match being postponed in accordance with Rule 4.7, the game must be rescheduled to be played on or before the following Monday at the same venue. If the game is not played at the second attempt the fixture will be reversed and played on or before the following Monday.
- 7.8** If the home team’s ground is unavailable, and no alternative can be source, the fixture will be reversed, at the expense of the first drawn team.

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8 PROTESTS/CLAIMS

- 8.1** The NIWFA Committee has the power to deal with all matters pertaining to the NIWFA League. Field offences and referees reports shall be dealt with by the appropriate Divisional Association or in the case of two teams playing from different Divisional Associations, by the IFA Disciplinary Committee.
- 8.2** All protest/claims giving full particulars (including player's full name and club details) must be lodged with the NIWFA Committee, c/o the secretary, before 10pm on the day after the match or incident. Email will suffice and the time on the email will be conclusive evidence. The appropriate fee must be sent to the League Secretary by recorded delivery no later than 48 hours from the time the complaint was submitted. Fee posting does not include Sundays or public holidays. This fee will be forfeited if the protest is not sustained.
- 8.3** A copy of any complaint/protest must be emailed to the registered Secretary of the opposing team at the same time.
- 8.4** All clubs, officials or players will be expected to answer any complaint at any hearing called by the NIWFA Committee to deal with the complaint.
- 8.5** Any club, official or player can appeal against any NIWFA Committee or IFA Disciplinary decision to the IFA Appeals Committee by following the appeals procedure as laid down in the IFA Articles of Association.

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N.I.W.F.A.TARIFFS

All tariffs for each forthcoming season shall be fixed by the League Committee prior to commencement of the league season and no later than one month before the commencement of the season.

Annual Subscription	2024 Tariffs
1 st XI	£125
Any other XI	£50
Referees Fees	£45 plus 30p per mile (£60 max)
Claim/Protest Appeal	£50
Fine for Playing Ineligible Player	£50 each time the player has played
Affiliation to IFA and Divisional Association	As set by IFA and Divisional Associations
Failure to fulfil fixtures (cup/league)	£100 for first failure
	£200 for second failure
	Exclusion from league for third failure
	£200 for playoff fixture failure
Good Behaviour Bond	£75 (which will be refunded minus monies owed if a club resigns from the NIWFA league)
Non-attendance at NIWFA meetings	£50 fine for each meeting missed

Divisional Associations will require direct payment for each team (for example, as part of online affiliation to CAFA).

All appropriate tariffs must be paid prior to any team playing their first competitive match.

All fines must be paid within twenty-one (21) days of notification, with failure to do so resulting in suspension from the league and the fine doubling.

All cheques must be made payable to N.I.W.F.A. and sent to the NIWFA Treasurer at their home address.