

ISFA U18 BOYS COMPETITION RULES

SEASON 2025-26

ETHOS

ISFA's competitions run in line with ISFA's overarching aim of "delivering football enjoyment for boys and girls in the 21st century".

The aim of this competition is to provide high quality competition for school pupils attending independent schools. Schools that participate are reminded that education and the school's ethos should continue on the football field as in all other areas of school life and thus participating schools must abide by the ISFA Code of Conduct. ISFA competitions are aimed at school pupils who are in full time education studying for recognised public examinations (eg A level, B-tec, GCSE) and take part in football as an extra-curricular activity; ISFA competitions are not aimed at those for whom academic study is an addition to a programme aimed primarily at football.

Academy players (registered under the EPPP) who attend independent schools are eligible to participate, subject to certain restrictions outlined in the Rules below. However, the primary interests of these players and the responsibility for their football development are catered for within the Academy system and are not the responsibility of ISFA. ISFA competitions are aimed primarily at school pupils playing recreational football – ie for school pupils who happen to be good at football, not for footballers who happen to be at school.

RULES

Changes for 2025-26 in bold italics.

1. CONTROL

The Competition shall be managed and controlled by the Committee of the Independent Schools Football Association.

2. ELIGIBLE SCHOOLS:

- **Boodles ISFA Cup:** All Schools who are Members of the Independent Schools Football Association shall be eligible to apply for entry. However, ISFA reserves the right to refuse entry to any school if, in ISFA's opinion, that school's participation is not beneficial to the competition or ISFA.
- **ISFA U18 Trophy:** The ISFA U18 Trophy will be open by invitation only to a list of 32 ISFA member schools published by ISFA. This list will be based on the ISFA ranking of schools according to the results in ISFA competition over the previous 5 years and will be open to schools ranked 25-56. In exceptional circumstances, in the interests of competitive balance, ISFA has the right to amend the ranking order if, in its opinion, a school occupies an artificial position.
- **ISFA U18 Shield and Bowl :** The ISFA U18 Shield will be open to all ISFA member schools not in the top 56 of the ISFA ranking of schools according to results in the ISFA competition over the previous 5 years. There will be no limit to the number of entries permitted. However if numbers exceed 40 the Bowl Competition will be introduced. In exceptional circumstances, in the interests of competitive balance, ISFA has the right to amend the ranking order if, in its opinion, a school occupies an artificial position

3. QUALIFICATION AND REGISTRATION OF PLAYERS

Any player born between 1st September **2007** and 31st August **2010** shall be eligible to play, subject to the rules outlined below. If ISFA has any reason for doubt the qualification of a player taking part in the competition, it may call upon the player's school to provide proof that the player is qualified

according to the rules and, failing satisfactory proof, the player or school may be disqualified from the competition.

A school fielding an ineligible player will be liable to disqualification from the tournament.

Full-Time Academic Education

1. Players must be full members of the named school and must be enrolled to take a full part in the school's academic curriculum for the full academic year.
2. Players must take public examinations at the same centre as the rest of the school
3. Players' academic results must be included in their school's published statistics including those seen in the government's league tables and the national press.

Late Entrants

No school may name on the match teamsheet more than 4 players who are classified as "Late Entrants". Each such player should be identified on the match teamsheet and player registration form.

A "Late Entrant" is classified as any player who was not on the school roll, and in full time study for academic courses, on 30th September in their Year 11.

Further explanation: Where a player's biological age does not match their school year group or where a school does not follow the traditional English format of year groups, the player must have been on the school roll, and in full time study for academic courses, on 30th September of the academic year during which they reach or reached their 16th birthday.

Academy Players

1. Schools must identify on the team sheet all those players who are contracted to an Academy operating under the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP), hereafter referred to as 'Academy'
2. No school may name on the match teamsheet more than 3 players who are contracted to an Academy
3. A school naming on the match teamsheet and/or playing more than 3 players who are contracted to an Academy will be expelled from the competition and may be subject to further sanction
4. A school failing to identify an Academy player on the match teamsheet will pay a £25 administration fee and may be subject to further sanctions (including expulsion from the competition)

Registration of Players

1. Schools must register all players with ISFA indicating their full name, date of birth and, if the player is contracted to an Academy, the name of that Academy. If a player becomes, or ceases to be, contracted to an Academy after registration, ISFA must be informed within 7 days
2. Schools may register up to 30 players in the first instance
3. Schools may register additional players at any time during the season, up to a maximum of 35 registered players
4. All players should be registered no later than midnight on the day before the match takes place
5. Where a school needs to register a player on the day of the match, this must be done by e-mail (katiwebb@isfa.org.uk), including the player's date of birth, at least one hour before kick-off. A late registration administration fee of £25 must be sent to ISFA to arrive within seven days of the match. Failure to submit an email and/or pay the £25 fee will result in the player being deemed unregistered.
6. ***A school fielding an unregistered player in a match will be liable to an administration fee of £25. In the event of a school fielding an unregistered player in a match on a second occasion in the same season, the school will be liable to further sanction including disqualification from the tournament.***

Match Report Form

1. A school naming on the team sheet and/or playing a player who is outside the permitted age range for the tournament will be expelled from the competition and may be subject to further sanction
2. A school naming on the team sheet and/or playing a player who has not been registered with ISFA will be subject to an administration fee of £50 and may be liable to further sanctions e.g. expulsion from the competition or suspension from future ISFA competitions/activities.
3. A school submitting false information on the teamsheet will be expelled from the competition and may be subject to further sanction

Sanctions and Administration Fees

A school not complying with a sanction and/or not paying an administration fee will be subject to further sanctions e.g. expulsion from the competition, suspension from future ISFA competitions/activities.

Transfer between schools

No player may play for more than one school in the tournament in the same season.

4. SAFEGUARDING OF PLAYERS

In all inter-school football, including matches played in this tournament, the safeguarding of the children involved is the responsibility of the relevant school's governance. Safeguarding in school football is underpinned by the [Department for Education 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' 2024](#).

5. ORGANISATION OF THE TOURNAMENT:

The competition shall be played on a knock-out basis with all matches to be decided on the day, with no replays. The team drawn first in each tie, with the exception of the Final, will have home advantage.

Boodles ISFA Cup: The First and Second Rounds will be drawn on a regional basis - north and south. The 8 highest ranked schools (based on results over the previous five tournaments) will be exempt until the Third Round (last 32). *The schools ranked 9-24 (based on results over the previous five tournaments) will be exempt until the Second Round, subject to the amount of entries. The Boodles Cup will be non-regionalised from 3rd Round (last 32) onwards.*

All matches must be played by the stated date. When dates are recommended, matches must be played within this period unless mutually agreed otherwise by both schools, in which case the agreed date must fall before the closing date for the round. The Final will be played on a date to be determined by the ISFA. Schools not completing matches by the stipulated date may be liable to disqualification from the tournament.

6. CODE OF CONDUCT

All matches must be organised and played in accordance with the ISFA Code of Conduct.

7. ARRANGEMENT OF MATCHES

a) Teams must agree on a date and kick-off time for their match and must inform the Tournament Secretary of the details by a date stipulated by ISFA. Teams unable to agree details for their fixture by the stipulated date should submit their position and proposals in writing to the Tournament Secretary. A Disputes Committee will then be appointed to arbitrate and decide on the date (and kick-off time) for the match. The decision of the Disputes Committee will be final and binding.

b) ISFA may expel from the tournament any school if, in its opinion, that school has made insufficient attempt to agree a date or has indulged in unnecessary delaying tactics.

c) Matches should be played on the ground of the home school unless specific permission is given by ISFA. ***Schools wishing to arrange a match on another ground (eg club ground) should inform ISFA in advance and ISFA may refuse permission if, in its opinion, the chosen venue is unsuitable for any reason. Where a school arranges a match on another ground (eg club ground), then that school will be responsible for the appropriate risk assessment being undertaken.***

d) Except where floodlit facilities are available, all matches must kick off no later than 2 hours before the published sunset time.

e) In all matches from the semi-finals onwards, and in all other matches at which a crowd is expected, pitches must be roped off to avoid spectators encroaching over the touchlines. The home school is responsible for ensuring that spectators do not encroach onto the pitch and are kept well back from the field of play.

f) Except in exceptional circumstances, any school refusing or failing to fulfil a fixture will be suspended from future participation in the tournament for a period of not less than one year.

8. POSTPONED MATCHES

In the event of a match being postponed, it must be rearranged before the closing date for the round. However, in the event of a postponement taking place after the away team have travelled, ISFA will decide on the venue for the rearranged match.

In the event of the pitch conditions preventing the playing of the game by the closing date for the round, the game must be played during the following midweek period or on the next available day that pitch conditions permit (whichever is the earliest). In the event that the home school pitch is unavailable, then the match will be played on one of the following, the final decision resting with ISFA:

- (i) the ground of the team drawn away ;
- (ii) a neutral ground arranged by ISFA.

Matches not completed by the closing date for the round must take priority over all other school games which should be postponed or cancelled if necessary. Any team failing to comply with this rule may be disqualified from the tournament. The final decision on the date and venue of matches not completed by the closing date for the round will rest with I.S.F.A.

9. DURATION OF MATCHES

Matches will consist of 40 minutes each way. In the event of a draw, an extra-time period of 10 minutes each way will be played. If the match is still drawn at the end of extra-time, then match will be decided by the taking of kicks from the penalty mark (as laid down in the Laws of Association Football).

10. DIMENSIONS OF THE PITCH, GOALS AND BALL

- a) The minimum permitted dimensions for pitches to be used in these tournaments are 100 yards in length and 60 yards in width.
- b) All matches will be played on a grass pitch or on a well maintained 3G football turf surface designed to meet the performance requirements of FIFA Quality or FIFA Quality Pro.
- c) The dimension of the goals will be full size (8 yards in width and 8 ft in height).
- d) A Size 5 ball will be used.
- d) Any complaint relating to the dimensions of the pitch, the goals or the safety of the playing surface should be lodged with the referee before kick-off or, if a problem arises after the match has commenced, within 30 minutes of the end of the match. ISFA must be informed of all such protests within 48 hours unless satisfactorily resolved.

11. ARRANGEMENTS FOR MATCH OFFICIALS

Unless advised to the contrary, the home school in each match shall be responsible for arranging for a fully qualified, youth registered, independent referee to officiate. A member of staff or parent at the home school or any school with a formal connection to it (e.g. junior/senior school, school under the same ownership/endowment/foundation) should not referee, even if he is a fully qualified referee.

The home team shall also be responsible for the payment of the referee (and assistant referees if appropriate).

The home school will be responsible for ensuring that the referee is provided with a Match Report Form and the rules of the tournament relating to the duration of matches and substitutes.

The appointment of fully qualified, neutral assistant referees is strongly recommended whenever possible for all matches and is mandatory from:

- **Boodles ISFA Cup** - the 4th Round (last sixteen) onwards.
- **ISFA Trophy/Shield/Bowl** - the quarter-finals onwards

On those occasions when it is not possible to provide qualified neutral assistants:

1. the away team must be informed not less than four days in advance of the match and each team will then be required to provide an assistant referee. Whenever possible this should be an adult or a pupil not involved in the match, ideally with experience or qualifications as an official.

2. A player involved in the match (ie named in the match squad) should only be used in extreme circumstances. Players involved in the match may not be used as assistant referees:

- **Boodles ISFA Cup- from the 3rd Round (last 32) onwards.**
- **U18 Trophy/Shield/Bowl – from the last 16 onwards**

3. The precise role of assistant referees, and the extent of their duties, will be determined by the match referee.

In the event of the home school encountering difficulties in appointing match officials, then they should contact the Tournament Secretary for advice, preferably at least one week in advance of the fixture.

In the event that the match referee fails to arrive and no qualified neutral assistants have been appointed, then the away team shall be offered the opportunity to provide the referee. If the away team declines, then the home team will provide the referee and the away team will accept the referee chosen and his/her decisions.

12. PLAYING COLOURS

In the event of a clash of colours, the away team must change unless competing schools agree a mutual alternative. In the Final Tie, both teams must wear numbered shirts. In the event of a clash of colours in the Final Tie, **ISFA will determine which school will be regarded as the “home” team.**

13. SUBSTITUTES

Teams may nominate up to five substitute players who may be used during the match. The names of the five nominated substitutes must be declared to the referee before the start of the match.. In all matches, the principle of “repeated” substitutes will be used. A player who has been substituted during a match then becomes a substitute and may, in turn, replace another player at any time, subject to the substitution being carried out in accordance with Law 3 of the Laws of the Game

14. REPORTING OF RESULTS

The winning team shall be responsible for reporting the result of the match to the Tournament Secretary (07413 590909, or by e-mail to results@isfa.org.uk) by 6.30 on the day of the game.

15. MATCH REPORT FORM

Masters in charge shall be responsible for completing accurately the Match Report Form, to be presented to the referee before the start of the match. Any team giving inaccurate information will be liable to penalty including, in extreme cases, disqualification from the tournament. The referee shall enter the score, scorers and details of any disciplinary offences. The home school will be responsible for returning the form to ISFA.

16. DISCIPLINE

- The Referee will report to the Disciplinary Secretary all cautions and dismissals.
- Discipline is carried across all competitions in which a player participates in. Any player receiving three cautions in an ISFA Cup, ISFA Trophy, ISFA Shield or ISFA Bowl match will be suspended from the next match in the ISFA Cup/Trophy/Shield/Bowl for which he/she is eligible to play.
- Any player who is sent from the field of play will be suspended from the next match(es) in ISFA Cup/Trophy/Shield/Bowl for which he/she is eligible to play. A one match suspension will be applied for red cards resulting from denying a goalscoring opportunity or two yellow cards; a two match suspension will be applied when red cards are issued for serious foul play, violent conduct, spitting, or offensive/insulting/abusive language or gestures.
- Cautions and pending yellow card suspensions will expire at the end of the season. Pending suspensions resulting from red card offences will be carried forward to the following season.
- Should the Referee report a particularly serious offence, the Disciplinary Secretary, after appropriate consultation, may increase the automatic suspension.
- Any misconduct by a player, substitute or team official which occurs off the field of play at any time before, during or after the match shall be reported to the Disciplinary Secretary who will, after appropriate consultation, take whatever action is deemed appropriate.
- ISFA will not accept appeals for red cards except in the case of mistaken identity.
- Each School is responsible for the conduct of its players, staff, other officials, and spectators. ISFA reserves the right to take action (including expulsion of an individual or a school from the competition) where a player, substitute, member of staff, other official, team or spectator is deemed guilty of

conduct liable to bring ISFA or the ISFA Cup into disrepute

i) Should the need arise, a Disciplinary Panel shall be appointed and their findings shall be final.

17. SPECTATORS

Appropriate provision must be made for spectators of both teams. All schools, whether playing at home or away, will be responsible for the behaviour of their own spectators, including pupils, parents and other supporters. From the semi-finals onwards, and at all other matches at which more than a few spectators are expected, it is mandatory for safety reasons that all spectators are kept back from the touchlines by a distance of not less than three yards, **and if possible at least five yards**, by means a rope or barrier.

18. PLAYER SUSPENDED FROM THE FINAL TIE

a) Where a player is suspended from the Final Tie, having accumulated two yellow cards, the Master i/c football at his School may apply in writing to the Chairman of ISFA for permission for the player to be involved in a non-playing capacity at the Final. The extent of any approved involvement shall be determined by the Chairman of ISFA.

b) Where a player is suspended from the Final, having been sent off in a previous match or because of serious misconduct, his suspension will include him being banned from the pitch, its surrounds and the technical areas for the duration of the Final. In exceptional circumstances, Master i/c football at his School may apply in writing to the Chairman of ISFA for this to be reviewed.

c) A player who is suspended from playing in the Final may not take part in the post-match presentation of ISFA mementoes.

19. FINAL TIE

The venue and date of the Final Tie will be at the discretion of the Independent Schools Football Association whose decision will be final. The Independent Schools Football Association will have the responsibility for the appointment and payment of the referee and assistant referees at the Final Tie. In the event of admission being charged at the Final Tie, gate receipts will be retained by the Independent Schools Football Association.

20. TROPHY OWNERSHIP: The trophy shall be the property of the Independent Schools Football Association. The school winning the tournament shall be responsible for the safe keeping of the trophy whilst under the care and custody of that school and shall be responsible for its return to the Independent School Football Association by 1st February in the year following their victory. The trophy should be returned in the same condition as that in which it was received.

21. I.S.F.A. reserves the right to deal with any matters not specifically provided for in the Rules of the Competition and to take whatever action they deem to be appropriate.

ARRANGEMENT OF FIXTURES - ADVICE TO SCHOOLS

In deciding a date and kick-off time, I.S.F.A. recommends that the following guidelines should be followed. These guidelines will be considered by the I.S.F.A. Disputes Committee in determining the date of a fixture when opposing schools are unable to agree:

1. All matches must be completed by the closing date.
2. When a midweek period is recommended, matches must be played in this in this period unless mutually agreed otherwise by both schools, in which case the agreed date must fall before the closing date for that round
3. the number of lessons missed by both teams should be kept to a minimum whenever possible. Home teams in particular should not normally have to miss lessons except in exceptional circumstances.
4. the team drawn at home should normally have the advantage of playing on their normal games afternoon.
5. morning kick-offs for midweek matches are not acceptable unless mutually agreed by both schools. Except where floodlit facilities are available, all matches must kick-off at least two hours before the published sunset time.
6. whenever possible the cancellation of existing fixtures should be avoided.
7. the playing of matches on consecutive days should be avoided whenever possible but is not

considered sufficient reason for refusing to play on a given date if no alternative is possible (particularly if the I.S.F.A. Cup match is the first of these consecutive matches).

Clearly it will not always be possible for all these conditions to be satisfied. There is of course always a danger of becoming too rigid with rules, leading to teams playing by the rulebook and refusing to co-operate. Ultimately our competition relies on goodwill and on schools adopting a conciliatory approach.