

2026 NIHL RULES

(Note: Rules in Red Print are changes for 2026)

1. The season will consist of a determined number of weeks based upon league playing strength with the last week being position night according to standings within divisions. The season starts **Thursday, April 30th, 2026**
2. **The last week of the season will be position night determined by standings at that time with higher seed being home team.**
3. Each year the League Tournament will only be held at a house with 6 or more pits. For 2026 the Annual Picnic/Tournament will be held on **Sunday, September 13th, 2026 at the McHenry Moose** with lunch served at 12:00 Noon, 1 PM Hall of Fame presentation and the annual tournament immediately following. At the tournament, players will not be allowed to walk shoes back between teammates. Each team must play with the same set of horseshoes. (Changed 2017)
4. The league will be divided into 2 or 3 divisions with playing strength being determined by the playing strength of the league. Ending total win points from the prior year and new additional teams determine which teams are in which division. In the event of 3 divisions, teams cannot jump from the Blue Division to the Red Division nor can teams fall from the Red Division to the Blue Division. **There will be 3 divisions for 2026.**
 - a. 3 Division Play – There will be 3 divisions named Red, White & Blue based upon team rankings when league playing strength is 20 or more teams. The top teams will be in the Red Division the lowest in the Blue Division. Division strength will be determined by the Captains at the annual Spring Meeting and will be based upon the number of teams in the league. New teams will be placed into the Blue Division. If applicable, for handicapping purposes, new team total YTD game and total points for the 1st week will be equal to the average of the Blue Division. The 1st few weeks (up to 12) will be inter-division play with the remainder of the season as intra-division play. Each team will not play against a few number of teams (up to 4) from each of the other divisions depending upon Captains approval and league play strength.
 - b. 2 Division Play - There will be 2 divisions named Red & White based upon team rankings when league playing strength is 19 or less teams. The top teams will be in the Red Division. Division strength will be determined by the Captains at the annual Spring Meeting and will be based upon the number of teams in the league. New teams will be placed into the White Division. For handicapping purposes, new team total YTD game and total points for the 1st week will be equal to the average of the White Division. The 1st few weeks (up to 9) will be inter-division play with the remainder of the season as intra-division play.
5. If a new team has 2 players returning from the previous year, they will be considered the original team. However, if a team splits up into 2 different teams with 2 original players each, the previous Captain's team will have the 1st option to remain as the original team and the other will be considered a new team. (Codified 2014)
6. Starting time each night is 7:30 PM with a 15-minute grace period. A match consists of 2 games being played simultaneously. A team can play with 3 players, under the "3 man roster" rule for each match played until the team has 4 players. The "3 man roster rule" allows a match to be played with only one person pitching against 2 players. The single player pitches against his scheduled opponent with no teammate pitching back. The shoes are simply walked backed to the single player and only the player with no opponent can score on the return pitch.

7. Away team enters its lineup on the score sheet 1st. A player can only play with the same teammate twice in one night. A team can use a maximum six-man roster each night. When players are temporarily replaced by substitutes, the player must return to the position from which he was substituted. (i.e. if #1 player is substituted, he must return to the #1 slot when re-entering.) A player cannot play or sub for more than 1 team. This rule has no impact on how many times the same opponent can play against any particular individual. (codified 2016)
8. Players must play directly with the opponent as matched on the official weekly score sheet. For example, Game 1 shows players A1 & A2 partnering against players H1 & H2. Player A1 must shoot with player H1 and player A2 must shoot with player H2. Home team determines which players shoot at which pit. Visiting players must follow according to the schedule. Home team also determines which player shoots first.
9. Each team will play 12 games to 21 points. Each game will be worth 1 point for a total of 12 points per night. If a team drops out of the league, the team will be considered a forfeiting team and called a BYE team. All previously played matches will be adjusted to receive points according to the following. The team playing a forfeiting team will earn the average of their last 3 weeks wins or the average of the forfeiting team's last 3 weeks losses whichever is higher with a guarantee of 6 points earned. When the league starts the season with an odd number of teams, there will be Bye nights. Bye night points earned will only be the average wins for the last 3 weeks or a guaranteed 6 points whichever is higher. To determine YTD points, a minimum of 3 weeks must be played in the current year; if not the last 3 weeks average from the previous year will apply. Regardless of forfeit or bye, YTD points will be the average of the last 3 weeks.
10. For Intra-Division play, each division will spot the difference in total wins divided by 2 with the max of 10 for handicap according to wins at time of play. (Changed 2023)
 - a. 3 Division Play – During all Inter-Division play, Red Division teams will spot 6 points to White Division teams and 12 points to Blue Division teams. White Division teams will spot Blue Division teams 6 points. (Changed 2023)
 - b. 2 Division Play – During inter-division play, Red Division teams will spot 6 points to the White Division teams or actual handicap, whichever is higher. (Reinstated 2021)
11. The winner of each division will be determined by total game points won YTD. Plaques will be awarded at the annual league picnic. (Reinstated 2021)
 - a. 3 Division League - Plaques will be awarded at the annual league picnic. If there is a tie for 2nd place, total YTD points will determine the position winner. No plaque will be awarded for 3rd place. In the event of a tie for 1st place, Rule 10c will be in effect. (Rule change passed 2016)
 - b. 2 Division League – If there is a tie for 2nd or 3rd place, total YTD points will determine the winner of the position. Plaques will be awarded for 1st, 2nd & 3rd place. In the event of a tie for 1st place, Rule 10c will be in effect.
 - c. Regardless of league playing strength, if there is a tie for 1st place in any division, there will be a playoff night with total YTD points not a factor. A normal 12 game format will be played with the 1st team reaching 7 wins to be crowned as the division champion. The losing team will automatically win 2nd place in the division. Each team will be the home team for one set of pits. (i.e. team X is always the home team on Pit 1 and team Y is always the home team on Pit 2) If at the end of 12 games the score is tied at 6 points, each Team Captain will choose 2

players to represent their team and play for the Gold in one final match. An up or down flip of the horseshoe will determine the home team for the 13th game and whom will play against whom.

12. In the event of bad weather, **both teams must still show up** at the scheduled house. After a waiting period of ½ hour, the home team Captain will make the final call to play or postpone the match. **If postponed, notice of the postponement must be immediately called in** and the match must be made up by the following Wednesday evening or contact President for an extension. If the make-up is not possible, each team will receive 6 game points with scores recorded as 21 – 20 for each game. (codified 2014)
13. Home team Captains must call in or text scores by 10:00 PM to the President unless the match is still in progress, then immediately upon conclusion. The phone number is **(815) 382-3526**. Report points won and lost for each team plus total points scored for each team.
14. Dues for the season will be **\$125.00** per team plus sponsor fee of **\$50.00** per team and are due on or before the 1st contest in June.
15. Any brand horseshoes can be used as long as they are sanctioned by the NHPA. Partners must use the same shoes during the match. When measuring for points hook the stake and measure to the outside edge of the shoe. Home team shoes will be used for measuring.
16. All pits will be covered (tarps not acceptable). Each pit must be numbered and conform to league specifications. Stakes are to be painted before the games begin and at half time. Approaches must be marked 3 foot in front of the stake (foul line). Pit backboards must be of an opposite color to enhance the ability to see the stake. All houses should have scoring posts at each set of pits.
17. Players aged 65 or older, players under the age of 18 and all women are allowed to throw from any distance but can not step beyond the foul line set at 27 feet. **Players aged 90 or older are allowed to throw from any distance but can not step beyond the foul line set at 25 feet.** The 25' and 27' foul line measurement is to be from the base of the opposite stake. Home team is responsible for marking foul lines. (**revised 2026**)
18. A house can only sponsor 2 teams for every court. (ie. 4 courts = 4 teams out of that house). The exception to this rule is Whiskey Bungalow (formerly Suds-R-U's) which is grandfathered and allowed 3 teams with 3 courts.

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2018 NIHL RULES ADDENDUM

This addendum to the 2018 rules was duly proposed and passed by a quorum of the Board of Directors of the Northern Illinois Horseshoe League (NIHL) at a special BOD meeting on April 16, 2018. Where applicable, this addendum supersedes the 2018 Rules as passed at the 2018 Spring meeting and apply only to the 2018 NIHL season.

- 1) All rules or statements that refer to 2 division play are rescinded.
- 2) For the 2018 NIHL season, the league will play with 19 teams and be divided into 3 divisions
- 3) The divisions will consist of 7 teams in the Red Division, and 6 teams in the White & Blue Divisions
- 4) Team 8 will be a BYE team with no play for the evening.
- 5) Teams will be awarded 6 points for playing against the BYE team
- 6) Because of the odd number in the Red Division, the team in 7th place on position night will not play and be awarded 6 points.

2019 NIHL RULES ADDENDUM

This addendum to the 2019 rules is an explanation of the amendment to Rules 8 & 9 of these NIHL Rules as duly passed at the 2019 Spring meeting of the Team Captains.

19. For 2019 the NIHL is adopting the National Hockey League (NHL) format of determining standings within all divisions for all Inter-Division play (outside division).

- a. During all Inter-Division play, each night a team can earn 0, 1 or 2 NHL points based upon how many games are won that night.
- b. For Inter-Division play, standings will be based upon YTD NHL points won not YTD games won.
- c. Win 0 - 4 games = 0 points, win 5 - 7 games = 1 point, win 8+ games = 2 points.

20. Once Intra-Division play begins (within division), whatever you have accrued in "YTD NHL Points" is the new starting point total for handicapping & standings purposes. From this point forward, NHL points are no longer a determining factor for standings or handicap purposes except for the 1st night.

- a. For the 1st night only of Intra-Division play, handicap will be based on 50% of the difference between total YTD NHL points accrued between teams playing with a 12-point maximum handicap and fractions rounded down.
- b. Games won that night will be added to the total YTD NHL points for a new point total for standings and handicap purposes.
- c. From that point forward to the end of the season, all games won count and will be added to the existing total win points for standings & handicap purposes as described in rule 8 of our NIHL rules.

Here's an example of what the 2019 Addendum is accomplishing.

Team A has 18 NHL points for the 1st 2/3 of the season. Team A now plays the 1st night in their own division. Team B has 12 NHL points.

Using our old handicap method but using NHL points as the determining factor, Team A will spot Team B, 3 points handicap (1/2 of the NHL point difference) for that match.

Let's say Team A wins 4 games and B wins 8. Team A's new point total is now 18 (beginning NHL points) +4 (games won that night) = 22 (New point total) to start off the next week.

Team B has 12+8=20 to start off the next week and our old handicap system of 1/2 the difference in wins will be in affect for the rest of the season based upon new weekly totals.

Team Captains will do nothing different throughout the year. Simply call in the number of wins and total game points as that which has been done for decades. The changes will be noticed on the weekly score sheet.

For Inter-Division play, rules 9a or 9b are in effect. For Intra-Division play, handicap will be based on 50% of the difference between total win points of the teams playing with a 12-point maximum handicap. Fractions of points will be rounded down. (i.e. 6.5 point difference will be a 6 point handicap)
(Reinstated 2021)