Coach/Director,

Thank you for your interest in joining us for the 2026 Thanksgiving Bowl National Championship. Below are some quick reference items we will need to make your team's experience at our event more memorable. The following items are explained in this packet: *Eligibility Rules*, *Game Play Rules and Procedures, and Protest Procedures*.

NEW in 2026:

- 6th Grade Division with 12U Age Cutoff – 145 pound skill position weight limit
- Late weigh ins only allowed on Thursday of the tournament

Quick Fact List:

- All teams must pay registration fee in full and submit completed Rocky Top Sports World team waiver prior to being scheduled for game play.
- When prompted via email, it is recommended that teams submit a league schedule including **playoffs**, **scrimmages** and any **additional games** played this season. This will help in scheduling tournament games.
- Divisions are set based on **age**, **skill**, and **size** (in that order). If a division is at 8 or more teams, there is a chance it could be split into two (2) divisions.
- The goal of the tournament is to provide pool play game options for all divisions, when possible. We want teams to have the opportunity to win their way back into a championship, even if they lose their first game.
- All players must be in jerseys or team branded tops with number for weigh ins. Athletic shorts or pants are recommended for bottoms.

Upon reviewing this information, feel free to contact us with any questions or comments at 865-202-6874 or Andrew@rockytopsportsworld.com

Thank you,

Andrew Capps, Rocky Top Sports World

2026 Thanksgiving Bowl Rules and Regulations

Eligibility Rules

1. Proof of age *must be presented* for all players who are participating in the 2025 Thanksgiving Bowl. Acceptable proof of age is a state ID, certificate of birth (with an official state seal visible/copies are accepted if seal is visible), conference ID cards, National Sports ID form, court documents or another official document that shows the date of birth. Photocopies of birth certificates without official seals, school records or other documents are not acceptable as proof of age. Incorrect, false, or doctored documents can lead to athlete ineligibility, forfeiture of games, banning from future participation in our tournament, and potential liability to others for any injuries that occur due to the use of an ineligible player. The age cut off for each age division is **August 1st of current year.**

2. At weigh-in, each team will turn in a team roster in numerical order and present their team book to tournament officials. Team books must be in numerical order, for each participating player there must be a player ID form completed with photo attached and notary seal (if using Birth Certificate). On the opposite page, or on the back if clear page protectors are used, will be the legal birth document. Hard copies of State IDs do not require a notary seal. Only the **head coach, one assistant coach,** and **a team representative** will be allowed in the area during weigh-ins. Weigh-ins can be conducted in shorts but players must be wearing jerseys or team branded top with number. Team representatives must be designated prior to weigh-ins.

3. **All weigh-ins will be on Wednesday, November 25, 2026, from 2:00pm-8:00pm EST.**
    1. ***NEW LATE TEAM/PLAYER CHECK IN POLICY IN 2026 If a player misses Wednesday weigh in/check in, he/she may be checked in at least 1 hour prior to team's game on Thursday, November 26, 2026. A late check in fee of $150 for a team/$25 per individual player could apply.***
    2. ***Player check ins after Thursday, are now strictly prohibited.***

4. **In weighted divisions, each head coach will receive a document listing the uniform number of overweight players on every team in their division.** During weigh ins, a Tournament Official will log all overweight players on each team, the coach will be asked to confirm that information is correct with signature. The documents will be distributed to all coaches during the Coaches Meeting. Overweight players will be given a wristband that must be worn throughout the tournament. If a wristband is lost or comes off during play, additional wristbands will be available at the scorer's table on each field. If an overweight player starts a game without a wristband on, the referee will issue a warning and the player must get a wristband on before returning to play.

5. **Each player must be checked in prior to being allowed to participate in their first game.** Once initial weight is determined, no additional weigh-ins will

be required. A coach can request a visual check of each player to be traded prior to every game to ensure that all players are checked and present for each game. The coach or team representative must have all registration paperwork present and available at each game (birth certificates and player identification sheets).

6. **Proof of Grade* required in the 6th and 8th Grade Division.** 6th Grade Division goes by 12U age cutoff requirements. 8th Grade Division goes by 14U age cutoff requirements. Acceptable forms of grade proof are: 2026-27 School Year Report Card/Progress Report or note on school letterhead confirming grade of athlete. This document will go behind the ID in team book.

7. **Random book checks may be performed throughout Tournament.** The Tournament Committee will choose games at random for book checks. These checks can be done in pregame warmups or at halftime. Teams will be asked to provide official team book, line up in numerical order on the field, and remove helmets. **Any team caught playing a game with an ineligible player will be disqualified from the tournament immediately– no exceptions.**

Age/Weight Divisions: Skill positions must be under the listed weight limits:

6U | 75.5LBS	*7U | 85.5LBS*
8U | 95.5LBS	*8U | Unlimited*
9U | 110.5LBS	*10U | 120.5LBS*
10U | Unlimited	*11U | 130.5LBS*
6th Grade Limited | 145LBS	*12U | Unlimited*
13U | Unlimited	*8th Grade Limited | 175LBS*

Skill Positions Include: QB, RB, FB, WR, TE, LB, DB

Note: An overweight TE can go out for a forward pas

Game Play Rules and Procedures

1. Any rules not covered in this section or in the coaches meeting will be governed by the NFHS Rule book.

2. All games will consist of four equal eight (8)-minute quarters.

3. A running clock will be utilized in any game in which a team is behind by 21 points. The clock will not be stopped for any reason other than timeouts until the point difference is less than 21 points.

4. If your team is late to the game (i.e. traffic, overslept, etc.), *your team will be penalized one 15-yard unsportsmanlike conduct foul* to be marked off during the opening kickoff. If there is more than a 15-minute delay, the opposing coach has the option of winning the game by forfeit. Have your team present and prepared to play at least 15 minutes prior to scheduled game time.

5. Each team must provide their own water bottles and footballs. Rocky Top Sports World will provide water coolers on-site for athletes and coaches. Teams will use Wilson K2, TDJ or TDY footballs or its equivalent. The game officials will determine if a football meets the equivalent criteria. Divisions using K2 Ball: 6U, 7U, 8U, 9U, 10U. Divisions using TDJ ball: 11U and 12U. Divisions using TDY ball: 13U and 8th Grade.

6. Radio headsets will be allowed on the sideline by coaches only.

7. The 6U and 7U divisions are allowed one coach on the field during regular game play. That coach is restricted from interfering in any manner of play. If officials determine that a coach interferes, that coach will be removed from the field of play to the sideline for the duration of that game and that team forfeits the right to have a coach on the field for the remainder of the game. If a coach decides to begin the game on the sideline, he may not move onto the field of play after the game begins.

8. If any player, coach, or spectator is ejected by a referee, field representative, Rocky Top Sports World staff member, or security personnel, ***the ejection will be for the remainder of that game and continue throughout that team's next game.***

9. Players may only participate in one age/weight division and for one team only. **This is for the safety and concern of the athlete.**

10. All teams must wear the same color jerseys. Helmets and pants are not required to be the same.

11. **No fighting will be tolerated**. If you/your team causes a disruption or interferes with play, you/your team will be automatically disqualified for the remainder of the tournament. You/your team will not be allowed to participate in any future Gatlinburg Thanksgiving Bowl Tournaments. You may also be at risk of legal liability.

12. **All tie games will be decided by NFHS Overtime Rules.** At the end of regulation, coaches will meet at midfield to flip a coin to determine who gets ball first. The ball will be spotted at the 10-yard line. Each team will have four downs to score. If a team loses possession of the ball if will be the other team's

ball. If team that lost possession is losing, the game is over. No time clock will be used. Each team will get one timeout per overtime quarter.

13. There will **be no smoking or alcohol use in the stands or on the sidelines before, during, or after any games.** Offenders will be ejected from the playing field.

14. **Disorderly conduct will not be tolerated.** You will be removed from the premises and/or your behavior brought to the attention of law enforcement. **Fans are not allowed on any playing surface.**

15. Special Teams

    a) There will be no live kickoffs or punts in the 6U – 11U divisions
    b) Play will begin at the 30-yard line.
    c) Punts will be marked off 20 yards when a team declares they are punting.
    d) Teams will not be allowed to declare punt if they are inside the opposing teams 30-yard line. The punt will go no further than the 30-yard line or 20 yards' total distance.
    e) Kickoffs and Punting will be live for the 12U, 13U and 8th Grade divisions.
    f) All age groups can attempt extra points. Successful kicks are worth 2 points; a successful run or pass is worth 1 point.

16. ***A player that exceeds the division weight limit without equipment is not eligible for an offensive backfield position.*** He cannot take a direct handoff and advance the ball behind the line of scrimmage as an offensive player. This player must line up on the line of scrimmage except in a punting situation, field goal or extra point attempt that is to be kicked. An overweight player may line up in the backfield as a kicker and must try to kick the ball. At no time can an overweight player who lines up in the backfield as a punter or kicker attempt to run or pass the ball. If the ball is not kicked then the ball must be downed. There are no fake punt plays, fake field goals, or fake extra points allowed with an overweight player in the backfield. A player that exceeds weight limit without equipment that lines up on the line of scrimmage is eligible for a forward pass if the pass is thrown past the line of scrimmage and the player who catches the pass is a legal receiver as per NFHS Rules.

17. A defensive player that exceeds weight limit without equipment must line up on the line of scrimmage on defense.

18. Any defensive player who recovers a fumble or intercepts a pass may advance the football.

19. If an overweight player is caught playing off the line of scrimmage, that team will receive a 15-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty.

20. All coaches, managers, and players must remain between the 25-yard line markers on the sidelines. **Only 8 total individuals (not including players) are allowed on the sideline. Individuals allowed are coaches, team managers, and photographers. Each individual MUST be included on the team roster and MUST always wear designated tournament pass while on the sideline. Unauthorized personnel could result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty.**

21. Foul language used by on-field players and/or coaches and players on the sideline will result in: 1st offense – warning*, 2nd offense - unsportsmanlike conduct penalty. *If there are 2 unsportsmanlike conduct penalties assessed during a game, the head coach will be ejected. *Depending on what is said, 1st offense may result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty. This is solely up to the discretion of the referee.*

22. If you or your coaching staff should have questions or concerns, the **HEAD COACH** is the only member of the team who is to address the Tournament Director and/or head official on the field.

Protest Procedure

The following **Player Eligibility Protest Procedure** applies to all Thanksgiving Bowl Events:

1. **Who Can Protest:** Player Eligibility Protests can be submitted only by the *HEAD COACH* of a team participating in the same division as the team with the player(s) whose eligibility is being challenged. For a team to submit a protest, the

team must provide a written protest form to a tournament representative. For this section tournament representative is defined as follows: *Tournament Director and Head Referee*.

2. **The Eligibility Committee shall handle all protest(s)**. Committee consists of:
    a. Rocky Top Sports World Team Member Representative
    b. Referee Assignor or Head Referee
    c. Field Director

3. **What Can Be Protested** *(referee calls cannot be protest as they are final!):*
    a. Player is beyond age maximum
    b. Player is not on the tournament team roster

4. **When Can a Protest Be Made**:

    a. *Pre-Game Protest:* A protest of player eligibility may be made at any time prior to a game. Any Pre-Game Protest should be submitted no later than 30 minutes prior to kick-off, so that it may be considered in a timely manner.

    b. *During-Game Protest:* Any during-game protest of player eligibility must be made before the conclusion of a game between the protesting team and the team with the player(s) whose eligibility is being challenged. Once the protest is filed correctly, then the game shall pause and any player or coach leaving the playing area will be deemed ineligible for play in that game.

    c. *Protest Limited*: No other player eligibility protests will be considered. A team is deemed to waive any opportunity to protest any player's eligibility not within above protest periods.

5. **How to File Protest:** All protests must be in writing on an official Protest Form and accompanied by the Protest Fee of $100 cash for each player challenged. The Protest Fee is refundable only if the matter is ruled in the favor of the protesting party. If the Protest is not upheld, the Protest Fee is forfeited. All forfeited protest fees will be applied to charitable activities of GHYAA which include support of youth sports teams and activities.

6. **Protest Upheld:** If a player is ruled ineligible, the player will be prohibited from participating in remaining games of the event. If a during-Game Protest is upheld, that game will be forfeited by the team with the ineligible player. No prior

games will be forfeited as teams participating in prior games will have waived their protest opportunity by failing to timely submit an Eligibility Protest. The team will NOT be allowed to continue to participate in the event with the ineligible player(s). The Protest Fee will be refunded to the protesting team for each protest upheld.

7. **Protest Denied:** If the Player Eligibility Protest is denied, the Protest Fee is forfeited.

8. **Ruling Binding:** Any Player Eligibility Protest ruling made by Eligibility Committee is binding upon all coaches, players, and attendees of the event. There is NO further appeal of any upholding or denial of a Player Eligibility Protest.

Concussion Protocol

1. **TN Sports Concussion Law:** The Thanksgiving Bowl will follow the TN Sports Concussion Law. Link

   "To require a youth athlete to be cleared by a licensed health care provider* before returning to play or practice."

   ** "Health care provider" means a Tennessee licensed medical doctor, osteopathic physician, clinical neuropsychologist with concussion training, or physician assistant with concussion training who is a member of a health care team supervised by a Tennessee licensed medical doctor or osteopathic physician.*

2. Each Head Coach will be required to sign Concussion Signature Form during Weigh Ins.

Scheduling of Games

1. *Scheduling of games will be done by the scheduling committee*. For this section Scheduling Committee will be defined as follows:
   a. Rocky Top Sports World Team Member Representative
   b. Referee Assignor or designee
   c. Field Director
   d. Gatlinburg Youth Highlander Athletic Association Representative

2. **All** teams will play on Thursday of the tournament (Thanksgiving Day).

3. Thursday game time may be requested in writing at least 2- weeks before the start of the tournament. Scheduling committee reserves the right to deny any

request of teams.

4. Thursday is for pool play games in divisions of 6 or less teams. Matchups are chosen by blind draw. Bracket play will begin on Friday. Brackets will be set and released on Thursday after the conclusion of all pool play games. Bracket seeding will be determined based on Thursday's results. In divisions of 8 teams, bracket play will start on Thursday.

Coach's Responsibility

Focus should be on the safety of your players. If you feel your players are at an increased risk of injury due to unsafe playing conditions, do not send them in to play the game. Address any concerns you have before the game starts and the players participate.

Conduct of fans: Fans are a representation of your team and community. If fans are becoming unruly, then it is the coach's responsibility to keep the order of fans and players at all time. A failure to do so by the coach, will result with the stoppage of play until the situation is resolved.

Weather Refund Policy

No Games Played- 100%
1 Game Played – 50%
2 Games Played – 0