



2026-27
**FOOTBALL
COACHES MANUAL**



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IMPORTANT DATES

2026-27 FOOTBALL SPORT CALENDAR

AUGUST 3	START – Practices, Scrimmages and Exhibitions
AUGUST 24	START – National Coaches Poll Releases <i>Dates: Aug. 24 (preseason), Sept. 14, Sept. 21, Sept. 28, Oct. 5, Oct. 12, Oct. 19</i>
AUGUST 27	START - Competitions
SEPTEMBER 7	START – National Player of the Week Releases <i>Dates: Sept. 7, Sept. 14, Sept. 21, Sept. 28, Oct. 5, Oct. 12, Oct. 19, Oct. 26, Nov. 2, Nov. 9, Nov. 16</i>
SEPTEMBER 30	DEADLINE – Nominations for NAIA Scholar-Athlete
OCTOBER 27	START – Area Rating Committee Rankings Release <i>Dates: Oct. 27, Nov. 3, Nov. 10, Nov. 15</i>
OCTOBER 27	START – National Selection Committee Polls Release <i>Dates: Oct. 27, Nov. 3, Nov. 10</i>
NOVEMBER 6	DEADLINE – Submitting Football Championship Series Questionnaires & Bids to National Office
NOVEMBER 13	DEADLINE – Individual Champions of Character Nomination Due
NOVEMBER 14	DEADLINE – Completion of Regular Season Competition
NOVEMBER 15	SELECTION SHOW - Football Championship Series Qualifiers, Pairings, & Sites for First Round
NOVEMBER 21	NAIA FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES – FIRST ROUND
NOVEMBER 23	DEADLINE – Submitting Conference Player of the Year Nominations to National Office
NOVEMBER 28	NAIA FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES – SECOND ROUND
DECEMBER 5	NAIA FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES – QUARTERFINAL ROUND
DECEMBER 12	NAIA FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES – SEMIFINAL ROUND
DECEMBER 15	RELEASE – All-American Teams Announced
DECEMBER 19	NAIA FOOTBALL NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP – Fort Worth, Texas
FEBRUARY 14-16	AFCA CONVENTION – Indianapolis, Ind.
JUNE 30	DEADLINE – Nominations for NAIA Scholar Teams Due
JULY 15	DEADLINE – Nominations for NAIA Hall of Fame

FIVE YEAR CALENDAR

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
First Round	Nov. 21	Nov. 20	Nov. 18	Nov. 17	Nov. 23
Second Round	Nov. 28	Nov. 27	Nov. 25	Nov. 24	Nov. 30
Quarterfinal Round	Dec. 5	Dec. 4	Dec. 2	Dec. 1	Dec. 7
Semifinal Round	Dec. 12	Dec. 11	Dec. 9	Dec. 8	Dec. 14
National Championship	Dec. 19	Dec. 18	Dec. 16	Dec. 15	Dec. 21



PLAYING RULES AND REGULATIONS

PLAYING RULES

NAIA Football will use NCAA Football Rules throughout the NAIA Football Championship series. These rules will be applied to all contests (preseason, regular-season and postseason) – [2026 NCAA Football Rule Book](#)

NEW Rule Modification for 2026 - NCAA RULES 1.4.6.F AND 1.4.11.B EXCEPTION

Permit the use of wearable technology for coach-to-player communication during NAIA football games, limited to non-audio devices (e.g., digital wristbands) worn on the wrist. Communication is restricted to in-game play calls and tactical information, with no limit on the number of participating student-athletes or the flow of data. All devices must remain non-disruptive to game administration and not interfere with officials' duties or equipment.

NCAA RULE 1.4.11.B EXCEPTION

The NAIA will NOT allow the use of coach-to-player (C2P) communications through the helmet that is permissive for NCAA divisions.

Any exception to the current NCAA rules must be passed by the NAIA Football Coaches Association or through a membership vote and will be noted in the Football Coaches' Manual and/or the Football Championship Series Manual.

GAME OFFICIALS

The outcome of all games is under the jurisdiction of game officials and all disputes, protests, etc., must be settled directly with the officials. Decisions of game officials are final and are NOT subject to appeal.

OFFICIAL BALL

The official football for all NAIA Football Championship Series (FCS) games is the Big Game/Team Issue football. Teams are required to use one of three football options from Big Game during the FCS –

1. The 1906 version with Big Game printed on the football;
2. Team Issue Logo;
3. Your school's customized "Team Issue" version

The NAIA strongly recommends the use of the Big Game/Team Issue football for all regular-season games.

UNIFORMS

NAIA uniform rule modifications to allow sponsor logos/patches during competition.

1. Limit of one sponsor logo or patch on a uniform.
2. The logos may not exceed a standard size of 2.25 inches square.
3. Sponsors of alcohol, tobacco, or any other legalized drugs (for example, Oregon marijuana) are not permitted.
4. Sponsors whose sole or primary business function is sports gambling (e.g., FanDuel, DraftKings, etc.) are not permitted.
5. Sponsor logos must be in the same location on each set of uniforms (e.g., if the home whites patch is on the neckline, all home whites must be the same; away jerseys could be in a different permissible location).

Football No sport specific location restrictions - Primary Location: Front shoulder panel opposite manufactures logo. Between the apex of the neckline and the shoulder seam. Secondary Permissible Location: If neither of the above locations is available at the back of the jersey, the apex/center of the neckline as close to the neckline as is possible.

SEASON RECORDS

Win-loss records for all member institutions participating in Football shall include ONLY those games played against a varsity program from an accredited, upper-level, degree-granting institution, and SHALL NOT include games against junior colleges, clubs, foreign (Canada excluded) or military teams.

FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES

The NAIA Football Championship Series consists of 20 teams. Seeds 1-12 will receive a bye in the First Round, while teams 13-20 will be paired up to play. The winners of the First Round game (4 teams), will be added to the other 12 teams in the FCS and be paired up by the National Selection Committee for the second round. This process will continue throughout the duration of the Football Championship Series. Each round, pairings will be determined based on the following:

1. NSC Final seeding



2. Geographical location of teams
3. Financial considerations

*Every attempt will be made not to pair conference teams in the First Round of the FCS. Based upon the pairings and selection criteria above, this may be unavoidable.

CONDUCT IN COMPETITION

EJECTIONS AND SUSPENSIONS

An ejection is an action enforced in conjunction with competition by a game official consistent with the playing rules in that sport. A suspension is required by NAIA bylaws (Article 6, Section B, Item 7) as an additional consequence related to ejections in conjunction with competition.

Ejection reports must be completed by the NAIA game official ejecting a student-athlete or coach and the Athletic Director of the ejected student-athlete/ coach. The form must be submitted to the NAIA within 48 hours after the completion of the contest.

[Ejection Report Form](#)

Ejections are not subject to appeal. Some sport rules allow protests through an official process outlined in each sport rule book. Suspensions may be appealed starting with the Conference/Association of Independent Institutions. An institution must submit an appeal to their conference within 72 hours of the completion of contest. The conference will submit a recommendation to the national office within 72 hours of receiving the appeal from the institution. The Conduct and Ethics Committee is responsible for all appeals related to suspensions due to ejections of a coach and/or student-athlete.

Once an appeal with appropriate signatures has been submitted to the conference, the student-athlete/coach may continue to participate through the appeal process. If the appeal is not approved, then the student-athlete/coach must sit out of the next scheduled contest(s).

Football Sport Rule – 2.27.12

- a. Disqualified Player:
 1. A disqualified player is one who is declared ineligible for further participation in the game and is allowed to remain in the team area.
 2. A player serving a first-half suspension due to his disqualification in the team's previous game may participate in pre-game warm-up activities. During the first half he may remain in the team area but may not participate in the first half of the game.
- b. Ejected Player:
 1. An ejected player is one who is declared ineligible for further participation in the game and is not allowed to remain in the team area. This player must leave the playing enclosure under the escort of team personnel before the next play after his ejection. He must remain out of view of the field of play under team supervision for the duration of the game.
 2. A player serving a first-half suspension due to his ejection in the team's previous game may participate in pre-game warm-up activities. During the first half he must remain out of view of the field of play under team supervision.

Football Exception 8/18/17 – Player(s) suspended under (Rules 9-1-3 and 4)

Targeting may be restricted to the sidelines if the suspension is to be served while the team is on the road and no other suitable supervisory options are available. In this case, while the suspended player(s) may still take part in warm-ups pre-game, the suspended player(s) helmet must remain under the control of the athletic trainer during the first half while serving a suspension.

NAIA NAC Policy Article IV

A player or coach serving a game suspension shall be restricted to the designated spectator areas and prohibited from any communication or contact, direct or indirect, with the team, coaches, bench personnel and/or game officials from the start of game to its completion, including any overtime periods. While the suspended coach or player is allowed on the field and in the bench area during pregame activities, the suspended player may not be dressed in their game uniform, and they may not take part in any warm-up activities.

Fighting

A half-game suspension is required by sports rule (not appealable through NAIA process); Two-game suspension is only required by NAIA bylaw and therefore is appealable through NAIA process.



NAIA POLICY HANDBOOK INFORMATION

The NAIA Policy Handbook can be found at [HERE](#). Please refer directly to the NAIA Policy Handbook for the following –

Competition

- A. Declaration of Intent to Participate – Bylaws, Article I, Section L
- B. Frequency of Play and Scheduling – Bylaws, Article I, Section F
- C. Criteria for Countable Contests – National Administrative Council, Article XXV, Section A, Item 12
- D. Reporting Results – National Administrative Council, Article XXV, Section A
- E. Forfeits – National Administrative Council, Article XI
- F. Conduct in Competition Guidelines – National Administrative Council, Article IV
- G. Ejection Policy – Bylaws, Article VI Section B Item 7
- H. Drug Testing and Reinstatement Procedures – Bylaws, Article VIII

Eligibility

- A. Definitions for Eligibility – Bylaws, Article V, Section B
- B. Eligibility Requirements – Bylaws, Article V, Section C
- C. Transfer Rules – Bylaws, Article V, Sections F-H
- D. Amateur Rules and Reinstatement – Bylaws, Article VII

Recruiting & Financial Aid

- A. Recruitment – Bylaws, Article II, Section D
- B. Campus Visitations and Tryouts of Prospective Students – Bylaws, Article II, Section C
- C. Financial Assistance – Bylaws, Article II, Section B
- D. Financial Aid Limits – Council of Presidents, Article XII

SUNDAY POLICY PLAY

As a matter of policy, NAIA Football Championship Series and National Championship competition will not be scheduled on Sunday. See NAIA Policy Handbook, National Administrative Council, Article XXIII for additional information.

DRUG TESTING

Drug testing may be done at any randomly selected NAIA National Championship competition for performance enhancing drugs. In accordance with the guidelines set forth by the National Drug Testing and Education Committee, the National Office will select which championships will incorporate drug testing each year. Student-athletes may be tested before, during and/or after NAIA National Championships.

More information regarding championship drug testing, the [National Administrative Council Drug Testing Policy Manual](#), the safety of supplements and over-the-counter medications and resources to increase awareness on your campus, please visit – www.naia.org/wellness

DRUG TESTING CONSENT FORM

Each academic year all eligible NAIA student-athletes must sign a [Drug Testing Consent Form](#) in which he or she consents to be tested for the use of drugs prohibited by the NAIA Banned Substance List to participate in any NAIA National Championship competitions. This consent form shall be administered by the institution.

To ensure all student-athletes participating in NAIA National Championship competitions have signed a consent form and such form is on record with the institution, a representative of each institution participating in any NAIA National Championship competition must sign an Official Certification of Student-Athlete Consent Form at check-in.

It is recommended that before the season begins that an institution has all student-athletes complete the form to minimize the possibility of issues occurring when the postseason roster is submitted at a NAIA National Championship.

MEDICAL EXEMPTION FORM

The NAIA recognizes that some banned substances are used for legitimate medical purposes. Accordingly, the NAIA allows exemptions to be made for those student-athletes with a documented medical history demonstrating the need for regular use of such a drug. Exemptions may be granted for substances included in the following classes of banned drugs – Stimulants, anabolic agents, beta blockers, diuretics, peptide hormones, anti-estrogens, and beta-2 agonists.

[Medical Exemption Form](#)

COACHES ASSOCIATION

NAIA-FOOTBALL COACHES ASSOCIATION (NAIA-FCA)

The NAIA Football Coaches Association (NAIA-FCA) is an organization of collegiate football coaches at NAIA institutions. The NAIA-FCA membership dues are paid by the institution as part of its NAIA membership dues for all personnel who receive all or part of their salary for their responsibilities within the athletic department. The NAIA-FCA Annual Business Meeting is held each January in conjunction with the American Football Coaches Association (AFCA) Annual Convention.

The NAIA-FCA elects officers who serve two-year terms (effective 2001) and provide the leadership for the Association. The NAIA-FCA studies and makes recommendations through legislation of actions affecting the organization and administration of the NAIA Football Championship Series. All action items are forwarded to the NAIA National Administrative Council for final approval. See Appendix A for a complete list of NAIA-FCA officers, committees and Past Presidents.

AMERICAN FOOTBALL COACHES ASSOCIATION

The American Football Coaches Association was founded in 1923 as a means of providing education, service, promotion and stimulation of interest in Football. To obtain these goals, the AFCA holds various types of coaching clinics, administers awards programs for coaches and athletes and publishes The Extra Point on a bimonthly basis. More information on the AFCA, membership and its programs may be obtained by contacting: AFCA, 100 Legends Lane, Waco, Texas 76706; Phone: (254) 754-9900.

NAIA-FCA VOTING

NAIA Coaches Associations must have a quorum (at least 50% of eligible voters) in order for a sport motion to be heard by the National Administrative Council. If a quorum (at least 50%) is not met at the business meeting, voting will be sent out using an online process following the business meeting in order to reach a quorum. If at least 50% of eligible voters are not in attendance at the business meeting motions will still be presented and discussed and if desired, a "straw poll" can be taken by those present to determine if a motion will be opened for a vote to the full coaches association.

NAIA FOOTBALL COACHES ASSOCIATION STANDING COMMITTEES

NAIA-FCA OFFICERS (Second of Two-Year Term)

President		
Matt McCarty	Northwestern College (Iowa)	mattmcc@nwciova.edu
1st Vice President		
Chris Stutzriem	Bismark State (N.D.)	chris.stutzriem@bismarckstate.edu
2nd Vice President		
Joel Osborn	Benedictine (Kan.)	josborn@benedictine.edu
3rd Vice President		
Avante Mitchell	Olivet Nazarene (Ill.)	amitchell3@olivet.edu
Past President		
Brad Griffin	Southwestern College (Kan.)	Brad.griffin@sckans.edu

NAIA LIAISONS

NAIA Liaison	Abby Schultz, NAIA Senior Championship Manager
NAC Rep	Matt Stepan, Director of Athletics, Montana Tech



NAIA FOOTBALL COACHES ASSOCIATION CONSTITUTION & BYLAWS

ARTICLE I – NAME

The name of this organization shall be the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics Football Coaches Association (NAIA-FCA).

ARTICLE II – PURPOSE

The purpose of the NAIA Football Coaches Association is to supervise and conduct programs that foster and promote NAIA Football. The NAIA-FCA, in conjunction with the NAIA National Administrative Council, shall establish policies and procedures for the conduct of the Association as well as the Football Championship Series.

ARTICLE III – MEMBERSHIP

Membership of the Association shall be made up of both active and honorary members.

- A. Active membership of this association shall be comprised of football coaches who are actively engaged in coaching Football at an NAIA institution.
- B. Honorary membership of the association shall be comprised of any retired NAIA coaches, NAIA Football Hall of Fame inductees, or any individual who, because of their contribution to NAIA Football, shall be nominated by the Executive Committee and elected by a majority vote of the Association's active membership.

ARTICLE IV – VOTING POWER

All members shall have the privilege of speaking from the floor at meetings. However, in voting matters, each institution shall only receive one vote.

ARTICLE V – OFFICERS (EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE)

- A. Officers of the Association shall consist of a President, First Vice President, Second Vice President, Third Vice President and immediate Past President.
- B. Officers shall be head Football coaches at NAIA institutions that are in good standing with the NAIA and who are active members of the Association.
- C. Officers shall be nominated at the annual business meeting and confirmed by Association vote.
- D. Each officer shall be elected for a maximum eight-year term beginning with the Third Vice President and then rotating upward until the Presidency term is complete.
- E. In the event of a vacancy, the normal progression will be accelerated to fill the vacant office and the remaining officers shall be empowered to appoint a coach from the membership to fill the remaining vacant spot. This appointee will not succeed in the normal progression of offices unless voted in by the membership at the next annual meeting of the Association.

ARTICLE VI – DUTIES OF THE OFFICERS

- A. The **President** shall afford leadership and guidance to the NAIA-FCA through all possible channels. He shall preside at the annual business meeting as well as any other meetings of the Association deemed necessary. He shall appoint committee chairmen and members whose appointments are not otherwise provided by the Constitution and Bylaws. The President will give the NAIA Football report during the AFCA Kickoff Luncheon. The President or appointed Executive Committee member will also serve as one of the game committeemen during the National Championship. The individual serving in the role of President for the NAIA-FCA during the 2026-27 academic year will also be a member of the Council for Student-Athletes (CSA). This role on the CSA is a two-year responsibility, regardless of their term lengths as an officer of the NAIA-FCA.
- B. The **First Vice President** shall assist the President in the performance of his duties and assume the leadership at all meetings unattended by the President. He shall coordinate the Daktronics-NAIA Scholar Athlete award program by collecting and reviewing all nomination forms and providing the NAIA National Office with a report. The First Vice President or an appointed Executive Committee member shall also serve as one of the game committeemen during the National Championship.
- C. The **Second Vice President** shall serve as chair as the Football Championship Series Manual Committee. He shall also be responsible for recording the minutes during the annual business meeting. Should the President or First Vice President have his team qualify for the National Championship, the Second Vice President will serve as one of the game committeemen.



- D. The **Third Vice President** shall be responsible for performing various duties during the annual business meeting. He shall be prepared to serve as one of the games committeemen during the National Championship should the President and Vice President both have their teams qualify for the National Championship.
- E. The immediate **Past President** shall serve as emcee during the annual Hall of Fame banquet which takes place during the AFCA Convention.

ARTICLE VII – MEETINGS

There shall be one annual meeting of the Association held in conjunction with the American Football Coaches Association Convention.

ARTICLE VIII – COMMITTEES

- A. The **Nominating Committee** is chaired by the President and is comprised of the officers of the NAIA-FCA. The Nominating Committee will make recommendations to fill vacancies on the Executive Committee as well as any other committees deemed necessary by the membership.
- B. The **Football Championship Series Manual Committee** is chaired by the Second Vice President and is comprised of two at-large members. This committee will work closely with the NAIA Football Sport Manager reviewing and updating the FCS Manual. Changes will require approval by the membership and may require approval from the NAIA National Administrative Council. At-large members are appointed by the Nominating Committee. Consideration will be given to those coaches who have FCS experience and whose nomination would create equal geographical representation.
- C. The **Convention Planning Committee** in conjunction with the NAIA National Office and American Football Coaches Association representative, is responsible for planning and evaluating the various meetings that take place during the AFCA Convention. The committee members will meet prior to the start of the NAIA meetings and perform a walkthrough of the convention site, meeting rooms, etc. This committee consists of a chairman, three at-large members and the President of the Football Coaches' Association. The committee chair shall give a convention report during the annual business meeting.

ARTICLE IX – AMENDMENTS

A proposed amendment shall be presented during the annual business meeting and must be approved by a two-thirds vote. Final approval must be given by the NAIA National Administrative Council.

REPORTING RESULTS AND STATISTICS

REPORTING RESULTS/SUBMITTING SCORES

Mandated by the NAC, all contest results must be reported to the NAIA Stats site (via Presto Stats) within 24 hours of completion and final statistics within 72 hours to be eligible for team and/or individual weekly ratings and honors. Institutions failing to report statistics and/or results any **two consecutive weeks, or a total of four weeks**, during the reporting period will not be eligible to be included in the national statistical website or leaderboards.

Institutions failing to report statistics or results for two consecutive weeks, or four total weeks during the season will be subject to a monetary penalty. The first violation will continue to be a warning. Any second violation (first penalty) will be a \$500 fine. The third violation will be a \$1,000 fine and a loss of postseason awards. The fourth violation will be a \$1,000 fine and will be dealt with at the discretion of membership services. Fines will be due within 30 days of notification.

STATISTICS

[Click here](#) to view national statistics throughout the year. Only statistics from games against varsity teams from upper-level, degree-granting institutions should be submitted. Categories will be determined on a sport-by-sport basis and by the NAIA Athletics Communications Department. Statistical minimums for all leaderboards are set by the NAIA National Office in consultation with the NAIA Sports Information Directors Association.

The host institution is responsible for recording both teams' official statistics. The home team must notify the opposing team at least 72 hours prior to contest if official stats will not be provided. The opposing team can file an appeal if they feel an error was made in the official stats up to 72 hours after the conclusion of the contest. The appeal must be filed with the home team up to 72 hours after the contest and both teams must change the stats. To view the full NAC policy on NAIA Statistics, please click [HERE!](#)

It is vital that sport records maintain a certain level of integrity and accuracy. The NAIA urges the official statistician for every sport to become familiar and have a working knowledge of the statistical manual.

AWARDS

NATIONAL PLAYERS OF THE WEEK

An NAIA National Offensive, Defensive and Special Teams Player of the Week will be selected by the NAIA Department of Athletics Communications & Media. Nominations must be made each Monday by the Conference Sports Information Director. The National Office will **NOT** accept nominations from anyone but the affiliated conference SID or designated representative. Affiliated Conference/CAC/Unaffiliated Groups may nominate only one athlete per award for national consideration.

ALL-AMERICA

NAIA All-America honors in Football consist of a 25-man first, second, and third-team listing. In 2006 the NAIA-FCA approved a motion to have the AFCA select the NAIA All-America team. The AFCA's NAIA All-America Selection Committee is made up of three head coaches from each of the AFCA's seven districts, one of whom serves as a district chairman, along with another head coach who serves as the chairman of the selection committee. The coaches in each district are responsible for ranking the top players in their respective districts prior to a conference call between the district chairmen and the committee chairman on which the team is chosen. The team will be announced each year during the week of the NAIA National Championship. Please see www.afca.com for more details.

CHAMPIONS OF CHARACTER INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AWARD

Each participating team shall nominate one student-athlete that has shown a documented display of exemplary character and sportsmanship during competition, on campus and in the community that exemplify the core values of Integrity, Respect, Responsibility, Sportsmanship and Servant Leadership.

NAIA SCHOLAR-ATHLETE

Criteria for the NAIA Scholar-Athlete Award are as follows:

1. Nominee must be a sophomore or above in academic standing;
2. Nominee must have been in attendance at the nominating institution one full academic year at the time of the nomination deadline (Sept. 30)
3. Nominee has a minimum grade point average of 3.50 (on a 4.0 scale) at the time of the nomination deadline (for transfer students the GPA is only at current NAIA institution).
4. Nominee has been certified as eligible and is listed on the eligibility certificate submitted to conference eligibility chair.
5. Nomination form is complete and submitted through NAIA Connect.
6. All the above information is to be received by Sept. 30 to be eligible for national press release/website, certificate and honors database – All criteria must be met by this date.

NOTE – There are no statistical/playing requirements needed to receive this award. NAIA Scholar-Athlete nominations will be filled out via NAIA Connect. You must have an account in order to fill out nomination forms as the forms are no longer available through SIDHelp. NAIA Connect is the only way to nominate student-athletes as a NAIA Scholar-Athlete.

If you do not have an account, please sign up and create your own. Access will be granted (usually) within 24 hours. Nominations will be processed entirely electronically. In order to complete a nomination, the student-athlete must have approved and signed a release of their cumulative grade point average for nominating purposes. If you or your sports information office does not have a signed release form from the nominated student-athlete on file, a blank document (PDF) will be available for download.

This release form does not need to be turned into the NAIA National Office. You are asked to retain it for your institutional records. The administrator nominating the student-athlete will sign electronically. To be eligible for listing on website or honors database, forms MUST BE SUBMITTED BY September 30, 2026. LATE nominations will not be accepted.

To download a template to create an award certificate for your student-athletes that have earned this honor, [CLICK HERE](#).

RED BANNER SCHOLAR AWARD

NEW FOR 2026-27: The Red Banner Scholar Award recognizes the highest level of academic achievement among student-athletes competing at each NAIA National Championship Final Site. The award celebrates the NAIA's commitment to developing

champions in the classroom, character, and competition by honoring the student-athlete(s) with the highest cumulative institutional grade point average participating in the national championship.

Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for the Red Banner Scholar Award, a student-athlete must:

1. Be listed on the official active championship roster (team sports) or be an official qualifier and active participant (individual sports) at the NAIA National Championship Final Site.
2. Be recognized as an NAIA Scholar-Athlete for the applicable academic year.
3. Meet all established NAIA Scholar-Athlete eligibility requirements and be submitted through the official NAIA Scholar-Athlete nomination process by the applicable sport deadline.

Selection Process

The NAIA National Office will determine the recipient(s) using approved NAIA Scholar-Athlete data.

- The eligible student-athlete with the highest cumulative institutional GPA at the national championship final site will receive the Red Banner Scholar Award.
- In the event of a tie for the highest GPA, all tied student-athletes will be recognized as co-recipients.
- No additional nomination is required beyond the NAIA Scholar-Athlete submission process.

SCHOLAR TEAM AWARD

In recognition of academic achievement, the NAIA names a Scholar Team for all sports in which Scholar-Athletes are recognized. **Based on a cumulative 3.0 season GPA for the current academic year** on a 4.0 scale, all members of the team who appear on the eligibility certificate will be included in the GPA compilation.

The deadline for Scholar Team nominations is **June 30, 2027**. Download the **NAIA Scholar Team Award Form** [HERE](#).

NAIA NATIONAL PLAYER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Each conference and each independent institution with a .500 record or above will identify a player of the year upon submission of its All-Conference information as its nomination for NAIA National Player of the Year. The selection committee will evaluate player's statistics and contributions to the team's success, as well as the player's success off the field and in the classroom. The award is recognition of achievement on the field but conduct off the field will also be considered.

The selection committee will vote on nominees in early December. Nominees will be designated by each conference or independent (provided they meet the criteria of winning record).

NAIA NATIONAL COACH OF THE YEAR AWARD

The AFCA selects a National Coach of the Year through a ballot of NAIA Football Head Coaches. All Head Coaches in the NAIA who are AFCA members are eligible for this award. The AFCA will also select five Regional Coaches of the Year. All recipients will be recognized at the AFCA Annual Convention. The NAIA will also recognize its Conference Coaches of the Year. The NAIA Conference Football Coaches of the Year are also honored at the Annual NAIA Hall of Fame Dinner at the AFCA Convention.

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP AWARDS

The NAIA maintains a standardized awards program for all National Championships. National awards are presented to the official party of each participating team. Individual plaques are awarded to the official party of the semifinal, runner-up and National Championship teams. Trophies are awarded to the semifinal, runner-up and National Championship teams. Each week throughout the Football Championship Series, Outstanding Offensive and Defensive Players are selected and presented with a plaque.

ORDERING AWARDS

Appropriate conference tournament awards are to be ordered by the conference chair and are the financial responsibility of the conference or the conference tournament host institution. Official NAIA awards must be ordered from:

Collegiate Awards

18081 E. Trafficway, Springfield, MO 65802

Contact – Brad Stout – brads@collegiateawards.com

NAIA FOOTBALL – Rule Modifications

NAIA football will follow NCAA Football Playing Rules with approved NAIA modifications. The modifications listed below are the only current modifications to the NCAA Football Rules. Any future modifications to the NCAA Rules must be passed by the NAIA Football Coaches Association (NAIA-FCA) and approved by the NAIA National Administrative Council (NAC).

NCAA RULES 1.4.6.F AND 1.4.11.B *EXCEPTION*

Permit the use of wearable technology for coach-to-player communication during NAIA football games, limited to non-audio devices (e.g., digital wristbands) worn on the wrist. Communication is restricted to in-game play calls and tactical information, with no limit on the number of participating student-athletes or the flow of data. All devices must remain non-disruptive to game administration and not interfere with officials' duties or equipment.

NCAA RULE 1.4.11.B *EXCEPTION*

The NAIA will **NOT** allow the use of coach-to-player (C2P) communications through the helmet that is permissive for NCAA divisions.