



## **NFNL Umpire Briefing – AFL Rule Changes for 2026**

The AFL has announced 9 rule changes for the 2026 season. The Northern Football Netball League (NFNL) has reviewed these changes and confirmed which ones will be adopted for the 2026 season across the senior men's and women's competitions.

The NFNL **WILL ADOPT** the following rule changes in 2026:

### **1. Centre Ball Up Contests**

At all centre ball-ups, each ruck must remain on their side of the centre circle line until they contest the ball. Rucks are not permitted to cross the line to make early body contact before the tap.

### **2. Shrugging in the tackle – prior opportunity**

A deliberate shrug or raising of the arms to break or draw a high tackle will now be considered prior opportunity. Once a player chooses to shrug, fend, or lift their arm and is tackled, failure to dispose of the ball correctly is likely to result in a holding the ball decision.

The NFNL **WILL NOT ADOPT** the following rule changes in 2026:

### **1. Last Disposal out of bounds (between the arcs)**

The AFL's new automatic free kick for last disposal between the arcs will not apply in NFNL. The existing "insufficient intent" rule remains in place for all NFNL competitions.

### **2. 6/6/6**

The AFL's removal of the requirement for a player to start in the goal square at each centre bounce is not applicable, as the NFNL does not use the 6/6/6 rule.

### **3. Remove the Centre Bounce**

The AFL's removal of the bounce (replaced by a throw up) from Rule 13.2 is not applicable, as the NFNL umpires already use throw ups.

### **4. Align the Kick in Time**

The AFL has reduced the kick-in time from 12 seconds to 8 seconds. This change applies only at AFL level and will not apply in the NFNL.



## **5. Stand Rule**

The NFNL does not enforce the AFL “stand” rule. No change for 2026.

## **6. Ruck Nominations**

The AFL now allows play to restart without a ruck nomination once the area is clear. This will not be implemented in the NFNL for 2026 as the NFNL does not accept any ruck nominations.

## **7. Removal of the Substitute Player**

The above rule is not applicable to the NFNL – AFL clubs will name 23 players with 5 players named on the interchange bench.