



# Flag Football Rules

## • Youth Ages 6-14

### Age Divisions & Eligibility:

Rookies: ages 6-7 years old, Freshmen: ages 8-9 years old, Sophmores: ages 10-11 years old and Juniors: ages 12-14 years old. A player's age on January 1 determines their division placement/eligibility for the entire calendar year.

### Players on the Field:

Rookies, Freshmen, Sophmores and Juniors - (7) seven offensive players versus (7) seven defensive players.

### General Rules:

- No contact or blocking allowed. (un-avoidable, incidental contact occurs in flag football. Referees have discretion in assessing penalties).
- Away team takes first possession at the start of the game.
- The ball is spotted where the ball carrier's feet are when the flag is pulled, not where the ball is.
- There are no fumbles. The ball will be spotted where the ball carrier's feet were when the fumble was made. I.e. a bad snap will be blown dead and the ball will be spotted at the center's feet.
- A player while in possession of the ball who touches the ground with any part of his body other than his hands or feet is down at the spot of such touching.
- Interceptions change the possession of the ball. Ball is spotted at end of runback. Interceptions that occur in the end zone can be returned or downed.
- A player must have at least one foot inbounds when making a reception. Players cannot return on to the playing field from an out of bounds position (unless they were pushed out of bounds and immediately come back in).

**Game Duration:** Each game is comprised of (1) five-minute warm up and (2) twenty-minute halves. There will be a halftime period of two minutes. Teams change sides at half time. Final two minutes of the game - NFL rules apply regarding clock stoppage. Officials can stop the clock at their discretion. The teams will be warned when there are two minutes left to play in the second half. If the game is tied at the end of the regulation time, a 5-minute overtime will be played with a running clock until the final 1 minute where NFL rules apply regarding clock stoppage. If the game remains tied after the end of the 5-minute overtime period, the game will end in a tie. For playoffs, consecutive 5-minute overtime periods will be played until a winner is determined.

**Scoring:** Touchdown = 6 points, Field Goal = 3 points, Extra Point = 1 point (5 yard line conversion or successful extra point kick); 2 points (10 yard line conversion), Safety = 2 points. If the score is tied at the end of regulation time, the game stands as a tie. NOTE: Running up the score is highly discouraged. If the spread is greater than 35, the league will treat the win only as a win by 35.

**Timeouts:** (2) two time-outs per team during the first half. (2) time-outs per team during the second half. Time-outs do not carry over.

### Uniforms & Equipment:

- All players are required to wear matching jerseys with numbers.
- Each player must wear turf shoes or sneakers. Screw in or metal cleats are not allowed.
- All flag belts are provided by the league. Flags may not be altered in any way – this includes no tying knots for any reason. If altered by a player or coach, an unsportsmanlike penalty will be assessed.
- No article of clothing may cover any portion of a player's flag belt - this means shirts are required to be tucked in and tight. If a player's clothing covers any portion of the flag, the referee has the right to make the player down upon touch.
- Mouth guards are highly recommended

## **Offensive Rules of the Game:**

- To start the play, the ball must be snapped by a center. Each time the ball is spotted a team has 25 seconds to snap the ball. Teams will receive one warning before a Delay of Game penalty is enforced.
- The offensive team takes possession of the ball at their 5-yard line and has four (4) plays to cross mid-field. Once a team crosses mid-field, they will have four (4) plays to score a touchdown or kick a field goal.
- If the offensive team fails to convert a fourth down attempt into a first down by gaining the required yardage (mid-field) or scoring, possession of the ball changes and the defensive team switches to offense. The ball is spotted at the point of last play with turnover on downs.
- If the offensive team informs the referee that they wish to “punt” on 4th down, the opposing teams takes possession of the ball at their 10-yard line. No actual “punt” is made.
- The Quarterback cannot run a sneak. In order for the Quarterback to cross the line of scrimmage, he may either pass the ball, fake a handoff, be blitzed from the defensive team or after 5 seconds have elapsed (counted off by the referee). Direct snaps to a player other than the player representing themselves as the Quarterback constitute that player receiving the snap to be considered the Quarterback and must conform to the above rules.
- All players are eligible to receive passes (including the quarterback if the ball has been handed off behind the line of scrimmage). Players can be in motion and in the backfield, along the lines of regular NFL football rules.
- The center cannot take a direct handoff back from the quarterback (no center sneak play).
- No Stiff Arming - A ball carrier may not stiff-arm, slap at, or push away any defender (flag guarding).
- No Flag Guarding - players are not allowed to use stiff arms, to chop down with the arms or in any way guard the flag from being taken by the defense. Some spinning can be a form (perhaps accidental) of flag guarding. He may not shield or guard his flag belt in any manner. This will be at referee discretion.
- No Diving - an offensive player may not dive anywhere on the field once he has possession of the ball (no diving for 1st downs or touchdowns).
- Offensive players must have possession of the ball before they can legally be de-flagged. A flag removed inadvertently (not removed by grabbing and pulling) does not cause play to stop. It should continue as if the flag had not been removed. In all situations where a play is in progress and a ball carrier loses his flags either accidentally or inadvertently, the de-flagging reverts to a (1) one-hand touch of the ball carrier between the armpits and knees. It is unsportsmanlike conduct and penalized as such for a player to remove his own flags before or during a live ball period.
- Unlimited number of legal laterals, pitches and hand-offs are permitted anywhere on the field. If the ball carriers flag falls off, the player will be down upon any one hand ‘touch’.
- A ball carrier must attempt to avoid contact with a defender. Offensive charging occurs when a ball carrier runs into a stationary defender. Accidental brushing/unavoidable contact is not charging.
- A ball carrier may not hurdle or jump over a defensive player (whether standing or fallen down). Officials will not allow any vertical leap by a ball carrier. However, officials will tolerate moderate spinning\* and lateral movements as long as the ball carrier does not commit a foul during play.
- A fumble, muff or dropped ball that lands in the playing area is immediately dead at that spot. The ball belongs to the team that last had possession unless; the ball lands on or behind that team’s goal line (safety is charged), the ball lands on or behind opponent’s goal line (touchback; opponents ball on their 10-yard line), or if the ball is fumbled on a 4th down that does not gain a 1st down. Note: When a ball is fumbled forward, the referee will spot the ball at the location of where the player initially fumbled the ball, not the forward spot where the ball lands.

## **Defensive Rules of the Game:**

- Zone or man-to-man defensive formations are both acceptable.
- Defensive players are eligible to cross the line of scrimmage after the ball is handed off, thrown, tossed, a play-action fake, fake handoff, or the 5 second count has elapsed.
- A defender may use his hands only to maintain balance while going around an opposing player. The defender may not push, pull or initiate contact with any opposing player.
- A defender may not hit or chuck a player off the line of scrimmage (no contact at anytime).
- A defender may not rough the passer. Roughing the passer is defined as any contact with any part of the passer, with or without contact of the ball. If the defender is trying to block the ball, he may not touch the passer’s arm or run into the quarterback.
- A ‘tackle’ is made when a defender detaches the ball carrier’s flag belt. The location of the ball at the time of the “tackle” determines where the ball is to be marked for the next play. When a flag belt is detached (but not cleanly

pulled by a defender and does not fall to the ground for several yards down the field) the ball is marked at the spot of the initial pull (where the clip was broken).

- A defender must use one-hand touch between the shoulders and knees to "tackle" a ball carrier who is not wearing his flag belt. Note: A defender may not touch the head of the ball carrier.
- A defender may not hold or grab any part of a ball carriers body or uniform. He may not detain a ball carrier by any physical contact when "tackling". He may not slap at, bump or knock the ball from a ball carrier's arms. He may not try to steal a ball.
- A defender may not tackle or push a ball carrier out of bounds (unsportsmanlike conduct).

### **Penalties – General:**

- All penalties are 5 yards (except for Pass Interference - 15 yards). The down will be repeated unless otherwise noted, and will be assessed from the line of scrimmage.
- All penalties can be declined; Penalties will not exceed half the distance to the opposing team's goal line from the line of scrimmage. Games cannot end on a defensive penalty, unless the offense declines it.
- Penalties of an intentional manner to stop the clock, at the referee's discretion, will not stop the clock.
- Unnecessary roughness can result in a player ejection by the referee and additional suspension by the league

### **Offensive Penalties:**

- Offensive Charging - 5 yards if accidental. Considered unsportsmanlike if intentional
- Delay of Game, Too Many Players on the Field, False Start, Offensive holding - 5 yards & repeat the down
- Player Out of Bounds (if player goes out of bounds, player cannot return to the field and catch ball) - 5 yards & repeat the down
- Illegal Forward Pass (pass received behind line of scrimmage) - 5 yards & loss of down
- Offensive Pass Interference (illegal pick play, pushing off/away defender) - 5 yards & loss of down
- Flag Guarding - 5 yards from the point of foul and loss of down

### **Defensive Penalties:**

- Offside - 5 yards & repeat down
- Pass Interference - 15 yards & automatic first down
- Roughing the Passer - 5 yards from the line of scrimmage or end of play & automatic first down
- Illegal contact (holding, blocking, etc.) - 5 yards & repeat down
- Illegal flag pull (before receiver has ball) - 5 yards & repeat down
- Illegal rushing (starting before the referee's count is completed) - 5 yards & repeat down
- Interference - play continues; 5 yards from point of interference; repeat the down

## **Sportsmanship:**

All coaches, parents and players are expected to exhibit good sportsmanship at all times. Foul play will not be tolerated - If the referee witnesses any acts of flagrant contact, tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, blocking, or any unsportsmanlike act, the game will be stopped and the player will be ejected from the game.

Trash talking is illegal (trash talk is talk that may be offensive to officials, opposing players, teams, or spectators). Officials have the right to determine offensive language. If trash talking occurs that disrupts the game, the referee will give a warning. If it continues, the player or players will be ejected from the game.

The attempted use of an illegal (non-rostered) player constitutes cheating and will result in a forfeit as well as suspension. Should it happen a second time, the team will NOT be eligible for the playoffs.

The officials have the final say on all judgment calls. No protest of a referee's judgment call will be permitted. Only the coach of the team may approach the referee on a rule interpretation. The referee has authority to rule promptly and, in the spirit of good sportsmanship, on any situation not specifically covered in the rules. The referee decisions are final in all matters pertaining to the game.