

Flag Football Rules 101

Equipment

- Football: A pebble-grained leather or rubber-covered ball in regular or intermediate/youth football sizes
- Mouthpiece: A protective mouthpiece must be worn at all times during a competition
- Flag Belt: Each player shall wear a one-piece quick-release belt, without any knots, at the waistline with three (3) flags permanently attached, one (1) flag on each side and one (1) in the center of the back
- Footwear: Players can wear rubber-cleated or flat-soled athletic shoes
 - Metal cleats, spikes, hiking boots, or other equipment deemed dangerous by officials will not be allowed
- Uniform:
 - All participants must have shirts that can be tucked in at the waist to avoid obstruction of flag-pulling
 - All players must should wear athletic shorts/pants without pockets or ones that can be zipped to mitigate finger injuries and ripped clothing
 - No jewelry or hats with hard bills should be worn
 - Sunglasses should be non-rigid/pliable, and eye protection is encouraged

Roster

- The team roster may contain a maximum of ten (10) players and five (5) players are required to start the game for both the offence and defence
 - For unified competition there is a ratio of three (3) athletes and a maximum of two (2) partners on the field
- Games are able to play with four (4) players if there has been a disqualification, injury, or an athlete no longer wants to play

Playing Field

- For one-way fields, the field is divided into quadrants
 - Plays will always go in one direction outward from the center of the field
- The dimension of the field will be fifty (50) yards long (including the end zones), twenty five (25) yards wide, with one 10-yard end zones
- The playing field can be modified to accommodate any lack of playing space
 - A space of at least five (5) yards around the field must be free and clear of obstructions.
- No-run zones exist five (5) yards before the midfield line and the end zone



- When the line of scrimmage is on or in the no-run zone, teams cannot run the ball.
- All plays must be passing plays, and handoffs are not allowed

Scoring

- Touchdown: six (6) points
- Extra Point: One (1) point from the 6-yard line and two (2) points from the 12-yard line
 - Penalty enforcement will change the spot of the attempt, not the point value of the extra point attempt
 - Teams can handoff the ball for a run or pass when going for two (2) points from the 12-yard line
- There are no safeties on one-way fields

Possessions

- All possessions, and change of possessions will begin at the starting possession line (35 yard line)
- The ball will always be spotted directly in the centre of the field for all possessions and subsequent downs
- The offence has four (4) downs to cross mid-field. Once the offence crosses mid-field, they have three (3) additional downs to score a touchdown
 - If the offensive team fails to cross midfield or score a touchdown in the prescribed number of downs, possession of the ball changes, and the ball will be placed at the 35-yard line
- Offences can have a member of their team or another individual be a non-receiving player who is the designated snapper to help start the play
 - That player/individual must stay kneeling directly in front of the quarterback for the entirety of the play and cannot move

Live Ball & Dead Ball

- A ball becomes live when it is legally snapped, and a down (possession) is in progress
 - Regarding penalties, live ball penalties are considered part of the play and must be enforced (penalty flag thrown) before the down is complete (ex. pass interference, flag guarding, most illegal procedures, illegal substitution, defensive offside, roughing the passer)
- A dead ball refers to the time before a ball is snapped and the action causing the play to end



- A play is ruled dead when:
 - The ball carrier's flag is pulled or the ball carrier loses their flag
 - Offensive offside, false start, illegal substitution
 - When the ball carrier steps out of bounds or any part of the ball carrier's body other than their feet or hands touches the ground (when a player in possession of the ball, the ball is an extension of the hand)
 - When a touchdown, extra point, or safety is occurs
 - When a forward pass strikes the ground or when a forward pass is caught simultaneously by opposing players (possession goes to the offence)
 - When an offensive receiver without a flag belt catches a ball
 - When a snapped ball touches the ground before simulating a handoff or attempting to be thrown
 - When a fumbled ball hits the ground
 - If fumbled forward, the ball is to be spotted where the ball carrier's feet were at the time of the fumble
 - If the ball is fumbled backwards, it is marked where it hits the ground
 - When an inadvertent whistle occurs
 - If an inadvertent whistle occurs, the team in possession has two options:
 1. Take the ball where the whistle blew, and the down will count
 2. Replay the down from the original line of scrimmage

Formations

- Line of scrimmage: Each team's line of scrimmage is a vertical plane through the front point of the ball, ending at both sidelines, and 1 yard in width when spotted by the official (i.e. a neutral zone)
 - No part of any player's body can be across the vertical plane of the line of scrimmage before the snap for both offence and defence to establish a neutral zone of play
 - Only one (1) offensive player has to be on the line of scrimmage for a legal formation
 - Quarterbacks or passers can have a member of their team snap the ball from the line of scrimmage or snap the ball themselves
 - The passer cannot have their entire body across the line of scrimmage when throwing
 - If a non-receiving player is the designated snapper, there must be one (1) receiving player on the line of scrimmage



- Motion: Only one (1) offensive player may be in motion at the snap
 - All motion must be parallel or backwards to the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped and cannot be forward
- Shift: All four (4) other offensive players must be stationary in their positions at the snap. A shift occurs when more than one offensive player is in motion simultaneously prior to the snap.
 - All other players must become set for one (1) second prior to the snap or going into motion. It is a penalty if the ball is snapped when more than one player is in motion (illegal shift)

Passing and Receiving

- All passes must be forward and received beyond the line of scrimmage. Backwards passes (laterals or pitches) are illegal regardless of field location
 - Screen passes and double passes are not allowed
- Shovel passes are allowed but must be received beyond the line of scrimmage
- All players are eligible to receive a forward pass, even the quarterback following a legal handoff
 - Unified competition: If a partner throws a pass, only athletes are eligible receivers. No partner-to-partner passes
- If a player steps out of bounds, they may not be the first player to touch the ball (illegal procedure)
- A player must have at least one (1) foot in bounds when making a catch
- Receivers have a right to their own space (the space within their wingspan) while running routes and attempting to make a catch, while a defending player tries to disrupt or intercept the ball
 - Receivers are not allowed to push, slap, hold, grab, stiff arm, or arm-bar defenders when running routes and attempting to make a catch (holding, illegal contact, offensive pass interference)
- Interceptions on a one-way field cannot be advanced (dead ball) and the ball will be spotted at the initial possession line (35 yard line)
- A defensive or offensive player may dive or jump to catch a pass but may not jump through the space of the opposing player
- Diving is illegal when used to take down a player or in an attempt to gain extra yards (personal foul)



Running the Ball

- Handoff: Is transferring possession of the ball from one (1) teammate to another without throwing, tossing, or kicking the ball
- The quarterback (the first player gaining possession of the snap) cannot advance the ball across the line of scrimmage at any point during a down, even if a legal handoff has occurred (illegal procedure & dead ball foul)
- The ball carrier **MUST** make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position
- Flag Guarding: Is an attempt by the ball carrier to obstruct the defence's access to the flags through contact by stiff arming, swinging arms, diving, hurdling, dropping the head or shoulder, or intentionally covering the flags with the football jersey in an attempt to shield a defender from grasping their flag (live ball foul)
- Offences can simulate or fake a handoff in an attempt to draw defenders across the line of scrimmage
 - Once any handoff action has occurred, defenders are allowed to cross the line of scrimmage to take the ball carrier's or quarterback's flag
- Only direct handoffs behind the line of scrimmage are legal and may be in front, behind, or to the side of the quarterback/offensive player, but must occur behind the line of scrimmage
- The offence may have unlimited handoffs until the ball crosses the line of scrimmage
- A player who takes a handoff can pass the ball, as long as they do not cross the line of scrimmage
- Any player, other than the quarterback receiving a handoff behind the line of scrimmage, can advance the ball beyond the line of scrimmage, unless snapped in a no-run zone
 - Unified competition: A handoff can occur between any combination of players behind the line of scrimmage. Combinations include athlete-to-partner, partner-to-athlete, athlete-to-athlete, and partner-to-partner
- Ball carriers are not permitted to jump, leap, hurdle, or **spin** in the officials' judgment while advancing the ball. The play is to be blown dead, and the ball spotted where the action occurred
- Ball carriers may have one foot off the ground for cuts and jukes to avoid a collision with another player
- No blocking or screening is allowed at any time
- Offensive players in close proximity to the ball carrier must stop their motion once the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage. There is no running with the ball carrier



Rushing & Pass Clock

- There will not be a designated rusher or rush line
- There will be a 7-second pass clock for every down (possession)
 - If the ball is not throw once pass clock has expired the play will be blown dead and offence will lose that down
- Once there has been any handoff action during a play, the 7-second pass clock will not be enforced, and defenders are allowed to cross the line of scrimmage to take the quarterback's or ball carrier's flag
 - Offensive players must avoid impeding the path of the rusher
 - If there is a designated snapper on the field the rushing player must avoid contact
 - Players rushing the quarterback or ball carrier may try to block a pass attempt, but solely attempting to grab their flag is most effective
 - **Any** contact to the throwing player will result in a roughing the passer penalty (live ball foul)
 - A defender who has rushed the quarterback without any handoff action will receive an illegal rush penalty

Flag Pulling

- A legal flag pull occurs when the ball carrier or quarterback is in full possession of the ball
- A flag is considered pulled when the clip is no longer attached to the side of the belt
- Defenders are not allowed to grab, hold, or pull any offensive players at any point when attempting to pull the ball carrier's or quarterback's flag
- A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off a player who is not in possession of the ball (illegal flag pull)
- It is illegal to pull or strip the ball from the carrier's possession at any time (illegal contact)
- If a player's flag belt inadvertently falls off during the play, the player is down immediately upon possession of the ball, and the play will be called a dead ball
- There can be the following options for gameplay
 - Competitive Game: Utilizing the given rules with both an offence & defence on a one-way field



Defending a Pass

- Defending players have a right to their own space (the space within their wingspan) and an opportunity to disrupt or intercept the ball when guarding a receiver
 - Offensive players cannot charge, stiff arm, or arm bar defenders
 - Defenders are not allowed to press/push, grab, hold, or pull receivers when guarding (holding, illegal contact, pass interference)

Penalties:

- A coach or designated captain will have the opportunity to decline or accept the penalty based on the result of the play
 - Officials may not ask for a decision when the penalty enforcement is obvious
 - The yardage may be declined when accepting a penalty
- Penalties will be assessed from the line of scrimmage unless they are spot fouls
 - Penalties occurring after the dead ball will be assessed from the new line of scrimmage
 - Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal yardage when the penalty yardage is more than half the distance to the goal
- If defensive pass interference occurs in the endzone, the ball will be placed on the one-yard line and an automatic first-down will be given if the line of scrimmage starts on the 10 yard line or closer (if further, half the distance will be assessed)

Unsportsmanlike Conduct Penalties

- Defensive penalty +10 yards from the dead ball spot and an automatic first down
- Offensive penalty -10 yards from the dead ball spot and a loss of down
- Any act that is deemed violent or aggressive will be assessed as an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty
- Two (2) unsportsmanlike penalties on any player or coach in a game result in a disqualification and may lead to additional discipline



Penalty Chart

ii. Defensive spot fouls

Defensive pass interference	Automatic first down
Holding/Illegal Contact	+5 yards and automatic first down
Stripping	+5 yards and automatic first down

iii. Offensive spot fouls

Screening or blocking	-5 yards and loss of down
Charging	-5 yards and loss of down
Flag guarding	-5 yards and loss of down
Holding/Illegal Contact	-5 yards and loss of down

iv. Defensive penalties

Defensive unnecessary roughness	+10 yards and automatic first down
Defensive unsportsmanlike conduct	+10 yards and automatic first down
Offside / illegal substitution	+5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Illegal rush (Starting rush from inside 7-yard marker)	+5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Illegal flag pull (Before the receiver has the ball)	+5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Roughing the passer	+5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Taunting	+10 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down

v. Offensive penalties

Offensive unnecessary roughness	-10 yards and loss of down
Offensive unsportsmanlike conduct	-10 yards and loss of down
Offside / false start / illegal substitution	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Illegal forward pass (Any pass received or lands behind the line of scrimmage or throwing a pass after crossing the line of scrimmage)	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Offensive pass interference	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Illegal motion (More than one person moving)	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Delay of game	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Impeding the rusher	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Illegal Procedure	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Taunting	-10 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down