

Junior High Flag Football Rules

Game

- At the start of each game, coaches and/or captains from both teams shall meet at midfield for the coin toss to determine who shall start with the ball. The visiting team shall call the toss.
- The winner of the coin toss has the choice of offense or defense. The loser of the coin toss has the choice of direction. Teams may not choose to defer to the second half.
- The offensive team takes possession of the ball at its 40-yard line and has four (4) plays to cross midfield. Once a team crosses midfield, they have four (4) plays to score a touchdown.
- If the offense fails to score, the ball changes possession and the new offensive team starts its drive on its own 10-yard line
- If the offensive team fails to cross midfield, possession of the ball changes and the opposition starts its drive from its own 10-yard line
- All possession changes, except interceptions, start on the offense's 10-yard line. If we are on a field and running possession from midfield to the endzone, the play is dead after an interception and the intercepting team takes possession (No pick sixes under these circumstances).

Terminology

- Boundary Lines: the outer perimeter lines around the field. They include the sidelines, and back of the end zone lines.
- Line of Scrimmage: (LOS) an imaginary line running through the point of the football and across the width of the field.
- Line-To-Gain: the line the offense must pass to get a first down or score.
- Rush Line: an imaginary line running across the width of the field 7 yards (into the defensive side) from the line of scrimmage.
- Offense: the squad with possession of the ball.
- Defense: the squad opposing the offense to prevent them from advancing the ball.
- Passer: the offensive player that throws the ball and may or may not be the quarterback.
- Rusher: the defensive player assigned to rush the quarterback to prevent him/her from passing the ball by pulling his/her flags or by blocking the pass.
- Downs (1,2,3,4): the offensive squad has four attempts or "downs" to advance the ball. They must cross the line to gain to get another set of downs or to score.
- Live Ball: refers to the period that the play is in action. Generally used regarding penalties, live ball penalties are considered part of the play and must be enforced before the down is considered complete.
- Dead Ball: refers to the period immediately before or after a play.
- Whistle: sound made by an official using a whistle that signifies the end of the play or a stop in the action for a timeout, half time, or the end of the game.
- Inadvertent Whistle: official's whistle that is performed in error.
- Charging: the movement of the ball carrier directly at a defensive player who has established position on the field. This includes lowering the head, contacting the defender with a shoulder, forearm, or the chest.
- Flag Guarding: an act by the ball carrier to prevent a defender from pulling the ball carrier's flags by stiff arm, lowering elbow or head, or by blocking access to the runner's flags with a hand or arm.
- Shovel Pass: a legal pass attempted beyond the line of scrimmage by throwing the ball underhand or pushing it towards a receiver in a shot-put type manner. (It must be across the Line of scrimmage)
- Lateral: a backwards or sideways toss of the ball by the ball carrier.
- Forward Pass: Any pass thrown from behind the LOS to a teammate beyond the LOS.
- Unsportsmanlike Conduct: a rude, confrontational, or offensive behavior or language.

Equipment

- Pony Division are to use a TDJ size leather or composite football.
- Midget Division are to use a TDY size leather or composite football.

- Players must wear shoes. Football cleats are encouraged; however, cleats with exposed metal are not allowed and must be removed.
- Players may tape their forearms, hands and fingers. Players may wear gloves, elbow pads, and kneepads. Braces with exposed metals are not allowed.
- Players must remove all watches, earrings and any other jewelry that the officials deem hazardous.
- Players' jerseys must be tucked into the pants if they hang below the belt line. Pants or shorts with belt loops or pockets must be taped.

Timing and Over-time

- Games are played on a 30-minute continuous clock with two twenty-minute halves. The clock stops only for timeouts and at the direction of the referees.
- Each time the ball is spotted, a team has 30 seconds to snap the ball. Teams will receive one warning before a delay-of-game penalty is enforced.
- Each team has one 30-second time out per game.
- Officials can stop the clock at their discretion.
- In the event of an injury the clock will stop and then restart when the injured player is removed from the field of play.
- During the regular season, if the score is tied at the end of 30 minutes, the game should be determined a tie.

Only in playoff situations, an overtime (OT) Period will be used to determine a winner. OT format is as follows:

- Overtime will be Sudden Death.
- The first team to score wins.
- If you don't score you lose.
- First possession will be decided by an overtime coin toss.
- All regulation period rules and penalties are in effect. There are no time-outs.

Scoring

- Touchdown: 6 points
- PAT (Point After Touchdown) All PAT attempts are made from the 10-yard line.
Note: 1-point PAT is pass only, 2-point PAT is run only.

Live Ball/Dead Ball

- The ball is live at the snap of the ball and remains live until the official whistles the ball dead.
- The official will indicate the neutral zone and line of scrimmage. It is an automatic dead ball foul if any player on defense or offense enters the neutral zone. Regarding the neutral zone, the official may give both teams a "courtesy" neutral zone notification to allow their players to move back behind the line of scrimmage.
- A player who gains possession in the air is considered in bounds if one foot comes down in the field of play.
- The defense may not mimic the offensive team signals, by trying to confuse the offensive players, while the quarterback is calling out signals to start the play. This will result in an unsportsmanlike penalty.
- Substitutions may be made on any dead ball.
- Any official can whistle the play dead.
- Play is ruled "dead" when:
 - The ball hits the ground including bad snaps.
 - The ball carrier's flag is pulled.
 - The ball carrier steps out of bounds.

- A touchdown, PAT or safety is scored.
- The ball carrier's knee or arm hits the ground.
- The ball carrier's flag falls out.
- The receiver catches the ball while in possession of one or no flag(s).
- The 7 second pass clock expires.
- Inadvertent whistle.
- The official feels like a defender has the ball carriers flag but the flag is unspellable.

NOTE: There are no fumbles. The ball is spotted where the ball carrier's feet were at the time of the fumble.

- In the case of an inadvertent whistle, the offense has two options:
Take the ball where it was when the whistle blew, and the down is consumed.
Replay the down from the original line of scrimmage.
- A team can use a time out to question an official's rule interpretation. If the official's ruling is correct, the team will be charged a time out. If the rule is interpreted incorrectly, the time out will not be charged, and the proper ruling will be enforced. Officials should all agree upon any controversial call to give each team the full benefit of each call.

Running

- The ball is spotted where the runner's feet are when the flag is pulled, not where the ball carrier has the ball. Forward progress will be measured by the players front foot.
- The quarterback cannot directly run with the ball. The quarterback does have the ability to scramble in the back field but cannot advance the ball beyond the line of scrimmage. The quarterback is the offensive player that receives the snap.
- Only direct handoffs behind the line of scrimmage are permitted. Handoffs may be in front, behind, or to the side of the offensive player, but must be behind the line of scrimmage. The offense may use multiple handoffs.
- "Center Sneak" play – The ball must completely leave the center's hands on the snap and he/she must step backwards off the line of scrimmage to receive a direct handoff from the QB before advancing the ball.
- Absolutely NO laterals or pitches of any kind.
- The player who takes the handoff can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage.
Once the ball has been handed off in front, behind or to the side of the quarterback, all defensive players are eligible to rush.
- Runners may not leave their feet to advance the ball. Diving, leaping, or jumping to avoid a flag pull is considered flag guarding.
- Spinning is allowed, but players may not leave their feet to avoid a flag pull. Jumping in the air in a forward motion to advance the ball, while attempting to avoid a flag pull, is not allowed. Lateral moves to the left or right are permitted.
- Runners may leave their feet if there is a clear indication that he/she has done so to avoid collision with another player without a flag guarding penalty enforced.
- **No blocking or "screening" is allowed at any time.**
- Besides the ball carrier or receiver, all other offensive players must stop their motion once the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage.
- No running alongside or behind the ball carrier.
- Flag Obstruction – All jerseys **MUST** be tucked in before play begins. The flags must be on the player's hips and free from obstruction. Deliberately obstructed flags will be considered flag guarding.

Passing

- All passes must be from behind the line of scrimmage, thrown forward and received beyond the line scrimmage.

- Shovel passes are allowed but must be received beyond the line of scrimmage.
- The quarterback has a seven-second “pass clock.” If a pass is not thrown within the seven seconds, play is dead as it is considered an incomplete pass, the down is consumed, and the ball is returned to the LOS. Once the ball is handed off, the 7-second rule no longer is in effect.
- If the QB is standing in the end zone at the end of the 7-second clock, the ball is returned to the LOS.

Midget/Pony level players are strongly suggested to utilize traditional under center of shotgun snaps however they can snap from the side with the center taking a knee, with their downed knee lined up behind the ball.

Receiving

- All players are eligible to receive passes (including the quarterback, if the ball has been handed off behind the line of scrimmage).
- Only one player is allowed in motion at a time. All motion must be parallel to the line of scrimmage and no motion is permitted towards the line of scrimmage.
- A player must have a least one foot inbounds when making a reception.
- In the case of simultaneous possession by both an offensive and defensive player, possession is awarded to the offense.
- Interceptions change the possession of the ball at the point of interception. Interceptions are the only changes of possession that do not start on the 10-yard line. (If we are playing on field working from the “40’s in” play is dead after an interception and the intercepting team takes possession at the 40.

Rushing the Passer

- All players who rush the passer must be a minimum of seven yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped. Any number of players can rush the quarterback. Players not rushing the quarterback may defend on the line of scrimmage.
- Once the ball is handed off, the seven-yard rule no longer is in effect and all defenders may go behind the line of scrimmage.
- A special marker, or the referee, will designate a Rush Line seven yards from the line of scrimmage. Defensive players should verify they are in the correct position with the official on every play.
- A legal rush is:
Any rush from a point 7 yards from the defensive line of scrimmage.
A rush from anywhere on the field AFTER the ball has been handed off by the quarterback.
If a rusher leaves the rush line early (breaks the 7-yard area), they may return to the rush line, reset and then legally rush the quarterback.
If a rusher leaves the rush line early and the ball is handed off before they cross the line of scrimmage, they may legally rush the quarterback.
- A penalty may be called if:
The rusher leaves the rush line before the snap crosses the line of scrimmage before a handoff or pass – Illegal Rush (5 yards LOS and first down).
Any defensive player crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped – Offside (5 yards LOS and first down).
Any defensive player, not lined up at the rush line crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is passed or handed off – Illegal Rush (5 yards LOS and first down).

Special circumstances:

- Teams are not required to rush the quarterback, seven second clock in effect.
- Teams are not required to identify their rusher before they play, however, if they do send a rusher, the rusher must verify with the official that they are in the correct position.
- If rusher leaves the 7-yard line before the snap, he/she may immediately drop back to act as defender with no offside penalty enforced.

- Players rushing the quarterback may attempt to block a pass; however, NO contact can be made with the quarterback in any way. Blocking the pass or attempting to block the pass and then contacting the passer will result in a roughing the passer penalty.
- Other than the Center at the Pony and Midget levels, the offense cannot impede the rusher in any way. The rusher has the right to a clear path to the quarterback, regardless of where they line up prior to the snap. If the “path or line” is occupied by a moving offensive player, then it is the offense’s responsibility to avoid the rusher. Any disruption to the rusher’s path and/or contact will result in an impeding the rusher penalty. If the offensive player does not move after the snap, then it is the rusher’s responsibility to go around the offensive player and to avoid contact.
- A sack occurs if the quarterback’s flags are pulled behind the line of scrimmage. The ball is placed where the quarterback’s feet are when flag is pulled.

Flag Pulling

- A legal flag pull takes place when the ball carrier is in full possession of the ball. Defenders can dive to pull flags, but cannot tackle, hold or run through the ball carrier when pulling flags.
- It is illegal to attempt to strip or pull the ball from the ball carrier’s possession at any time.
- If a player’s flag inadvertently falls off during the play, the player is down immediately upon possession of the ball and the play ends.
- A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off a player who is not in possession of the ball.
- Flag guarding is an attempt by the ball carrier to obstruct the defender’s access to the flags by stiff arming, dropping the head, hand, arm or shoulder, or intentionally covering the flags with the football jersey.

Formations

- Offense must have a minimum of three players on the line of scrimmage and up to six players on the line of scrimmage. The quarterback must be off the line of scrimmage.
- One player at a time may go in motion 1-yard behind and parallel to the line of scrimmage. No motion is allowed towards the line of scrimmage.
- Offensive players must come to a complete stop for one second before the ball is snapped unless he/she is the only player in motion.
- Movement by a player who is set or a player who runs toward the line of scrimmage while in motion is considered a false start.
- Defenders may not “jam” the receiver at the line of scrimmage.

Unsportsmanlike Conduct

FOUL PLAY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED!

- If the field monitor or referee witnesses any acts of intentional tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, blocking or any unsportsmanlike act, the game will be stopped, and the player will be ejected from the game. The decision is made at the referee’s discretion. No appeals will be considered.
- Offensive or confrontational language is illegal. Officials have the right to determine offensive language. If offensive or confrontational language occurs, the referee will give one warning. If it continues, the player or players will be ejected from the game.
- Players may not physically or verbally abuse any opponent, coach or official.
- Ball carriers MUST try to avoid defenders with an established position.
- Defenders are not allowed to run through the ball carrier when pulling flags.

Fans must also adhere to good sportsmanship, as well:

- Yell to cheer on your players, not to harass officials or other teams.
- Keep comments clean and profanity free.
- Compliment ALL players, not just one child or team.

Fans are required to keep fields safe and kid friendly:

- Keep younger kids and equipment such as coolers, chairs and tents a minimum of 10 yards off the field in the end zone area.

Penalties

- The referee will call all penalties. REFEREES WILL CALL PENALTIES AT THEIR OWN DISCRETION. THEY WILL TAKE LEVEL OF PLAY AND PACE OF THE GAME INTO CONSIDERATION.
- Referees determine incidental contact that may result from normal run of play.
- Only the team captain or head coach may ask the referee questions about rule clarification and interpretations. Players may not question judgment calls.
- Games may not end on a defensive penalty, unless the offense declines it.
- Pass interference by the defense in the end zone will result in the offense taking possession at the 10-yard line with their remainder of plays to score. If the infraction occurred on fourth down the offense will receive one down to score.
- In the event of multiple pass interference infractions by the defense in the end zone the offense will receive an automatic touchdown.

Penalty yardage

- Defensive offsides and illegal rush- 5 yards from the LOS and automatic first down.
- Offensive offsides, illegal formation, illegal downfield running, delay of game, and impeding the rusher - 5 yards from the LOS and loss of down.
- Offensive Flag guarding, Charging, or runner leaving their feet- Runner is ruled down at spot of penalty
- Offensive pass interference 10 yards from LOS and loss of down
- Defensive pass interference 10 yards from the LOS, automatic first down
- Defensive roughing the passer - 10 yards from the LOS, automatic first down