



Flag Football League Rules

Syracuse City

All Playing Rules will be those under the current NFL Flag Football Rulebook. This applies to game play only and does not include administrative procedures or actions. Amended Syracuse Parks & Recreation Flag Football playing rules are as follows:

1. GENERAL RULES

- A. Captains and head coaches meet for the coin toss. The visiting team calls the toss.
- B. The winner of the coin toss may choose to go on offense or defense. The loser of the coin toss chooses the end zone to defend. The team that starts the game on defense will start the second half on offense and vice versa.
- C. Teams will play 6 vs 6 in 1st/2nd grade, 7 vs 7 in 3rd/4th grade, and 7 vs 7 in the 5th-9th grade. Each team can play will 1 less player in any case. If a team has less players than 1 less player, the game will be declared as a forfeit in the standings. (Example: 1st/2nd grade cannot have less than 5 players, 3rd/4th grade cannot have less than 6 players, and 5th-9th cannot have less than 6 players). However, please divide players amongst both teams and play a scrimmage game.
- D. Head coaches should ensure that each player plays at least half the game.
- E. **1st-4th:** Start of the game will start on the offensive teams 5-yard line. All possessions, except interceptions, begin where the ball is spotted. On 4th down the offensive team has 2 choices: 1) go for the 1st down. If they still fail to cross the next line to gain, the opposing team takes over possession from the spot of the ball. (2) Turn the ball over to the opposing team who starts its drive from its own 5-yard line. The official shall then notify the other team of the decision, so they may get into the appropriate formation.

5th-9th: Start of the game will start on the offensive teams 5-yard line. All possession changes begin where the ball is spotted. On 4th down the offensive team has 3 choices: 1) go for the 1st down. 2) Punt the ball to the other team. 3) Move the ball to the first line-to-gain of the opposing team, change possession, and begin play there. The 4th down decision must be announced to the official prior to beginning the play. The official shall then notify the other team of the decision, so they may get into the appropriate formation. On a punt, neither team may cross the line of scrimmage until the ball is kicked. **(No fake punts allowed.)**

2. EQUIPMENT

- A. 1st-4th grade division will use a Pee Wee size ball (Blue). 5th-9th grade divisions will use a junior size ball (Brown). Each team is provided (1) one game ball by the league and needs to be at every game.
- B. The city provides each player with a flag belt that must be wore throughout the game.
- C. The side flags must be worn on each side of the players' hips in line with the hip joint.
- D. The league provides each player with a jersey which must be worn during games. Home teams wear dark jerseys; visiting teams wear light jerseys. Unless it is physically impossible, jerseys must be always tucked in during the game.
- E. Pants or shorts with belt loops or pockets are strongly discouraged.
- F. Players may wear athletic shoes or molded rubber and plastic cleats. **Cleats with metal tips or baseball spikes are not allowed.**
- G. Players may wear gloves, elbow pads, and kneepads. **Braces with exposed metals are not allowed.**



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- H. Players must remove all watches, earrings, and any other jewelry that the officials deem hazardous.
- I. All offensive players must have both flags on while on the field of play or face an Improper Equipment penalty (5-yards from the original line of scrimmage). If the flag falls off while in the field of play, this penalty will not be assessed.

3. REGULATION PLAY AND CLOCK

- A. Game consists of two 20-minutes halves. Halftime is 3 minutes. Teams change ends to begin the second half.
- B. The clock will be a running clock (20 minutes) for the first half unless a time-out is called.
- C. During the second half the clock runs during the first 18 minutes of the half unless a time-out is called.
- D. During the last 2 minutes of the second half, the clock will stop when there is a dead ball. (Incomplete pass, a penalty, change of possession, or when a ball-carrier runs out of bounds).
- E. In the 1st/2nd grade age divisions the offensive team has 40 seconds to snap the ball once the official has called ready for play. In the 3rd-9th grade age divisions the offensive team has 30 seconds to snap the ball once the official has called ready for play. The offense may snap the ball at any time after the Headline Judge has signaled the start of the 30 or 40 seconds (ready to play) whether the defense is ready or not. The referee will warn the offensive team when there are 10 seconds left on the snap count clock, as well as 5 seconds left on the snap clock.
- F. Each team has three (3) 60-second time-outs per-game.
- G. Officials can stop the clock at their discretion for injuries, etc.

4. FIELD CONDITIONS

- A. It is the responsibility of the field supervisor to determine whether the conditions are safe. He/She may call the game.
- B. In the event a game must be suspended because of conditions which make it impossible to continue play, the site supervisor shall declare it an official game if one complete half or more of the game has been played.
- C. If less than one-half of the game has been played, the game may be rescheduled from the start, or restarted from the suspension of play according to the Syracuse Parks and Recreation Department.

5. OVERTIME (5th-9th ONLY)

- A. If the score is tied at the end of regulation, teams move into overtime.
- B. Overtime is a one-point (5-yards) or two-point (10-yards) conversion competition. Teams will take turns attempting to score one- or two-point conversions until one team has scored more points than the other team and both teams have had a possession. **If the score is still tied after each team has had two possessions, the game will be called a tie (regular season only).**
- C. Captains will meet at midfield for a coin toss. Winner can choose whether to go on offense or defense first. The side of the field will be chosen by the official.
- D. If the score remains tied after the first overtime period, the team that lost the overtime coin toss has the choice of offense or defense at the start of the second overtime. The choice of possession will alternate in each subsequent overtime period.
- E. All applicable regulation period rules and penalties are in effect.



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- F. There are **no time-outs** in overtime.

5. COACHES

- A. Coaches are volunteers whose role it is to help young people learn to play and enjoy flag football. Parents are encouraged to always support their youth and their coach.
- B. (1) one coach in the 1st/2nd grade age divisions is allowed on the field to assist players with their positions. At the snap, offensive on-field coaches **MUST** be 5-yards behind their nearest player. Defensive on-field coaches **MUST** be on the sideline pre-snap.
- C. (1) one coach in the 3rd/4th grade age division on offense is permitted on the field pre-snap to help their players but **MUST** be off the field prior to the snap of the ball. On defense the coach **may not** come onto the field of play.
- D. Coaches of 5th-9th grade age divisions **MAY NOT** come onto the field of play during a game unless a player is injured.
- E. (2) two coaches per team are allowed on the sidelines. **ONLY THE HEAD COACH WILL ADDRESS THE GAME OFFICIALS.**

6. CONDUCT

- A. Any and all physical contact is limited to incidental contact that is a normal part of flag football.
- B. Players are expected to behave in a civil manner. Flag slamming, flag throwing, or other uncivil acts will result in a verbal warning for the first offense and an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty for each subsequent offense.
- C. Taunting, trash talking, cursing or other offensive language or behavior by players, coaches, parents, or their fans will result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty for the first offense and forfeiture for the second offense.
- D. Reckless play deemed by the referee to be potentially dangerous or harmful (e.g., tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, roughing, pushing, etc.) will result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty. Two such acts committed by one player during a game will result in automatic ejection.
- E. Play that is deemed by the referee to be intentionally malicious (e.g. clothes lining, blatant tackling with no effort to pull flags, etc.) will result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty and immediate player ejection. Two such acts by one team during a game will result in immediate forfeiture and potential league sanctions.
- F. Players, coaches, or spectators who are ejected from a game, must vacate the premises. Failure to do so will result in game suspension and forfeiture.
- G. Field Supervisors and game officials have the authority to suspend play and declare a forfeit if players, fans, and/or coaches behave in a manner that is threatening or dangerous. One “game suspension” warning will be issued.
- H. In addition to the penalties assessed during a game, conduct violations may carry additional penalties associated with league participation, and will be determined by the league and city officials.
- I. For safety reasons, spectators must be seated a minimum of 10 yards from the sidelines.

7. DEAD BALL

- A. Play is ruled “dead” when:



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- a. The ball touches the ground.
 - b. Ball carrier's flag is pulled.
 - c. Ball carrier steps out of bounds.
 - d. Ball carrier's knee, elbow, hip or backside touches the ground.
 - e. When a touchdown or extra point is scored.
- B. Substitutions may be made on any dead ball.

8. SPOTTING THE BALL

- A. The ball is spotted where the ball is when the flag is pulled. The ball must break the plane of the goal line for it to be considered a touchdown.
- B. If a ball carrier's flag falls out while running, he/she is down when touched with one hand by a defensive player. (One hand touch).
- C. If a player doesn't have a flag on and possesses the football, they are down where possession occurs.
- D. Defensive players that start a play without a flag can intercept a pass but cannot advance it. The ball is spotted where the interception occurred.
- E. When punting the ball; if a punt touches the ground and is not caught in the air, the ball is dead on the spot.
- F. The play is ruled dead when the ball makes contact with the ground. In the case of a fumble or muffed snap, the ball is spotted at the forward-most grounded foot of the player who last touched it.
 - a. Example 1: a player fumbles the ball forward. The ball is spotted where the players forward-most grounded foot was at the time of the fumble, not where the ball lands.
 - b. Example 2: a player muffs a snap while standing in the end zone. The ball is spotted where the player's forward-most foot is at the time of the muff, not where the ball lands. This would result in a safety.
 - c. Example 3: a center snaps it over the head of the QB but the QB does not touch it. The ball is spotted at the forward-most grounded foot of the center.

9. SNAPPING THE BALL

- A. The ball may either be snapped in between the legs of a center, or the center can turn and pitch it back to the quarterback (side-snap), but the play will start when the ball moves, not when the quarterback gets the ball.
- B. **Center sneak plays are not allowed.** Note: a center sneak is any play in which the ball is transferred immediately to the center from the player receiving the snap. A center must take at least one step forward to receive a legal forward pass or one step backwards to accept a legal handoff or pitch.
- C. In the 3rd-9th grade age divisions, the ball can be snapped from the center to any offensive player, as long as it leaves the centers hands. Exception: In the 1st/2nd grade age divisions the ball can be snapped from the center to any offensive player as a direct handoff.
- D. **1ST-4TH grade ONLY-** If the ball falls to or touches the ground during the initial center to quarterback exchange, the play is ruled a "Do Over" with no loss of down, once per down. On a second consecutive occurrence, the down is consumed.
- E. The ball must be snapped from the spot where the referee places it.



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- F. Any number of offensive players may shift prior to the snap but only one player on offense is allowed in motion when the ball is being snapped. There is no minimum number of players on the line of scrimmage, only a center to snap the ball. The player in motion must be moving parallel to the line of scrimmage or in a backward direction. All other players on offense must be set prior to the snap.

10. RUNNING

- A. Any player receiving a hand-off or a pitch behind the line of scrimmage is eligible to run the ball. **Note:** a pitch may be tossed or thrown underhand or overhand to a player standing in a spot *behind* the player pitching it.
- B. A player receiving a backwards pitch or backwards throw can then attempt a forward pass and throw the ball down field, as long as they're still behind the line of scrimmage.
- C. The player receiving the snap is eligible to run, if rushed by the defense behind the line of scrimmage.
- D. Once the ball has been handed off or pitched, all defensive players are eligible to rush the ball carrier regardless of their position prior to the snap.
- E. No handoffs are allowed once the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage.
- F. Laterals are allowed behind the line of scrimmage.
- G. 1 (one) lateral or pitch is allowed beyond the line of scrimmage. The runner or receiver is allowed 1 (one) lateral or pitch backwards to another offensive player passed the line of scrimmage. If the ball is fumbled or muffed during a lateral or pitch the offensive team will be penalized 3-yards from where the ball has touched the ground/ end of the run.
- H. No-Run-Zones are located 5 yards before each end zone (see field dimensions). A running play toward the goal line is **not allowed** when the ball is **spotted** in the No-Run-Zone. The only way to advance the ball from the No-Run-Zone is with a forward pass.
- I. If a player is missing a flag and takes a handoff or makes a catch, they are down where the possession (handoff or catch) occurs.
- J. Spin moves are allowed by the ball carrier as long as one foot is in contact with the ground. **No jumping.**
- K. Ball carriers may not flag guard. They must maintain a running or passing form and may not bat, shove, or push the defender's person or limbs away. Flag guarding is when the player with the ball intentionally guards his/her flag by hitting or slapping the defensive players hand away from their flag. Flag guarding can also be hiding the flags under and un-tucked shirt or tying the flags to their belt so they don't come off.

11. PASSING

- A. Once a legal forward pass is completed, no other forward passes are allowed in front of the play. Note: A forward pass is any ball tossed or thrown overhand or underhand to a player standing in front of the player throwing it.
- B. A player receiving a backwards pitch or backwards throw can then attempt a forward pass and throw the ball down field, as long as they're still behind the line of scrimmage. Once the ball is handed off, the 7 second pass clock is no longer in effect.
- C. Shovel passes are allowed and subject to all the rules pertaining to forward passes.
- D. The quarterback has 7 seconds to handoff or pass the ball. A violation will result in a loss of down.



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- E. Interceptions may be advanced. Interceptions made on extra points are dead balls and the point after try is no good.

12. RECEIVING

- A. All players are eligible to receive forward passes or pitches.
- B. If a player is missing a flag and catches the ball, the player is down where possession occurs.
- C. A player must have a least one foot inbounds when making a reception.
- D. An offensive player who voluntarily runs out of bounds during live action may not return to the field of play until the ball is dead.
- E. An offensive player who is forced out of bounds during live action by contact with a defender may return to the field of play during live action without penalty.
- F. If a defensive player pulls a receiver's flag prior to a legal reception of a pitch or forward pass, the defense will be flagged for Illegal Flag Pull, but the play will not be whistled dead. If the receiver catches the pass or pitch, the play will remain live until the receiver's other flag is pulled. If both flags are pulled illegally and the catch is made, the play remains live until a defender touches the ball carrier with one hand (penalty will be assessed after the play).
- G. When a pass is thrown, any player from either team has a right to catch the ball. If in the attempt to catch the ball, a player hinders an opposing player by physical contact (pushing, shoving, slapping etc.) pass interference will result. Referees will determine incidental contact that is a normal part of flag football.
- H. If a ball is simultaneously caught by 2 opposing players, possession will be awarded to the offense with the ball being dead at the spot.
- I. Receivers are not allowed to be impeded when going out to receive a pass.

13. RUSHING THE QUARTERBACK

- A. All players who rush the passer must be a minimum of 7 yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped. A cone on the field will stand 7 yards from the line of scrimmage. Any player who wants to rush the quarterback must start behind the cone. Rushers are not allowed to be impeded until they reach the line of scrimmage.
- B. Rushers have the ability to rush the quarterback without being impeded until they cross the line of scrimmage. Wide receivers that cross the line of scrimmage to go out for a pass cannot be impeded.
- C. Any number of players can rush the quarterback, as long as they start behind the rush line (7-yards from the line of scrimmage).
- D. Rushers may jump to block a pass but may not make contact with the QB.
- E. If a rusher leaves the rush line prior to the snap, he/she may return to the rush line, reset, and then legally rush the quarterback.
- F. Once the ball is handed off or pitched, the 7-yard rushing rule no longer in effect, and all defenders are eligible to rush.

14. SCORING

- A. Touchdowns are worth 6 points.
- B. Extra points are worth 1 from the 5-yard line and 2 from the 10-yard line.
- C. A safety is worth 2 points.



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15. RULES VIOLATIONS

- A. All penalties will be assessed at the end of the play.
- B. Diving or leaping to advance the ball is not allowed.
- C. **No intentional blocking** or “screening” is allowed at any time.
- D. Any player that comes onto the field from out of bounds after the play has begun will be penalized for illegal participation.
- E. Referees will determine intentional contact that results from normal play. Players must go for the flag; no pushing out of bounds, and no grabbing the ball carrier to enable easier flag pulling.
- F. Penalties may be declined.
- G. In the case of offensive and defensive penalties occurring on the same play, the down will be replayed unless one of the infractions was a personal foul. In that case, the personal foul would take precedence over the non-personal foul. Example: A defender interferes with a pass and, following the whistle; the offensive player turns and pushes the defensive player in anger. While both the defense and the offense are flagged respectively for pass interference and unsportsmanlike conduct, the offense alone would then be penalized for the personal foul of unsportsmanlike conduct.
- H. Games cannot end on a defensive penalty unless the offense declines it.
- I. The ball may not be stripped from the runner. Players need to go for the flags.
- J. Flag guarding is when the player with the ball intentionally guards his/her flag by hitting or slapping the defensive players hand away from their flag. Flag guarding can also be hiding the flags under an untucked shirt or tying the flags to the belt, so they do not come off.

16. GENERAL PENALTIES

- A. Roughing/Unsportsmanlike conduct=**10 yards** from end of play.
- B. Delay of game=**5yards** from the original line of scrimmage.
- C. Too many players on the field=**5 yards** from line of scrimmage.
- D. Illegal pitch=**5yards** from original line of scrimmage or point of infraction if beyond the line of scrimmage.
- E. Improper equipment=**5 yards** from the original line of scrimmage. Note: when the listed penalty yardage is in excess of half the distance between the goal line and the spot from where the penalty yardage is to begin, the penalty will be “half the distance to the goal line.” Example: the original line of scrimmage is 7 yards from the goal line. The defense is flagged for being off-sides. The ball will be moved toward the goal and spotted at the 3 ½ yard mark.

17. OFFENSIVE PENALTIES

Note: Loss of down means no repeating of down. An offensive penalty on 1st down costs the offensive team yardage plus the 1st down play during which the penalty occurred. The next play run by the offense would be 2nd down. Penalties on 2nd down are followed by a 3rd down play. Penalties on 4th down plays result in a change of possession. You choose the play or the penalty.

- A. Illegal Hike/Illegal Motion/False Start=**5 yards** from the original line of scrimmage.
- B. Illegal Run in No-Run-Zones=**5 yards** from the original line of scrimmage.
- C. Illegal Forward Pass=**5 yard** from spot of the pass and a loss of down.



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- D. Fumble or Muffed pitch or lateral=**3 yards** from the end of the run.
- E. Offensive Pass interference=**10 yard** from the original line of scrimmage and a loss of down.
- F. Center Sneak=**5 yard** from the original line of scrimmage.
- G. Failure to pass within 7 seconds=**Loss of down only**.
- H. Illegal participation (player enters the field of play after ball has been snapped) =**5 yards** from the original line of scrimmage.

18. OFFENSIVE SPOT FOULS

- A. Screening, Illegal Blocking, Running with the Ball=**10 yard** from spot of foul and repeat down.
- B. Charging=**10 yards** from the spot of the foul and repeat down.
- C. Flag Guarding=**10 yards** from the sport of the foul and repeat down.

19. DEFENSIVE PENALTIES

You choose the play or penalty.

- A. Offside/Illegal Rush=**5 yards** from the original line of scrimmage.
- B. Illegal contact/Illegal Flag Pull=**10 yards** from the original line of scrimmage and automatic first down.
- C. Illegal Participation (player enters the field of play after the ball has been snapped) =**5 yards** from the original line of scrimmage and **automatic first down**.

20. DEFENSIVE SPOT FOULS

- A. Defensive Pass Interference= **10 yards** from the original line of scrimmage and automatic first down.
- B. Holding= **10 yards** from the end of the run.
- C. Stripping=**10 yards** from the end of the run.

21. FIELD DIMENSIONS

1st-4th: The fields are 30 yards by 60 yards (provided field space allows) with two 10-yard endzones. Every field will have a midfield line-to-gain with no-running zones preceding the end zone by 5-yards.

5th-9th: The field is 30 yards by 70 yards (provided field space allows) with two 10-yard endzones. Every field will have a midfield line-to-gain with no-running zones preceding the end zone by 5-yards.



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PENALTIES

i. Defensive Spot Fouls

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| Defensive Pass Interference | +10 yards from the line of scrimmage and automatic first down |
| Holding | +10 yards from the end of the run |
| Stripping | +10 yards from the end of the run |

ii. Offensive Spot Fouls

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|---|---|
| Screening, Blocking, or Running with the Ball Carrier | -10 yards from the spot of the foul and repeat down |
| Charging | -10 yards from the spot of the foul and repeat down |
| Flag Guarding | -10 yards from the spot of the foul and repeat down |

iii. Defensive Penalties

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|--|---|
| Defensive Unnecessary Roughness | -10 yards |
| Defensive Unsportsmanlike Conduct | -10 yards |
| Offsides | +5 yards from the line of scrimmage |
| Illegal Rush (starting rush from inside 7-yard marker) | +5 yards from the line of scrimmage |
| Illegal Flag Pull (Before the receiver has the ball) | +10 yards from the line of scrimmage and automatic first down |
| Roughing the Passer | +10 yards from the line of scrimmage and automatic first down |
| Taunting | +10 yards from the line of scrimmage |

iv. Offensive Penalties

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| Offensive Unnecessary Roughness | -10 yards |
| Offensive Unsportsmanlike Conduct | -10 yards |
| Offensive Pass Interference | -10 yards from the line of scrimmage and loss of down |
| Illegal Forward Pass | -5 yards from the line of scrimmage and loss of down |
| Fumble or Muffed Pitch or Lateral (passed the LOS) | -3 yards from the end of the run |
| Offside/False Start | -5 yards from the line of scrimmage |
| Delay of Game | -5 yards from the line of scrimmage |
| Impeding the Rusher | -5 yards from the line of scrimmage |
| Illegal Pitch/Hike/Motion | -5 yards from the line of scrimmage |
| Illegal Run in the No-Run-Zones | -5 yards from the line of scrimmage |
| Illegal Run by Passer | -5 yards from the line of scrimmage |
| Center Sneak | -5 yards from the line of scrimmage |
| Failure to Pass within Pass Clock (7 seconds) | Loss of down only |

v. Additional Penalties

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|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Improper Equipment penalty | 5 yards from the line of scrimmage |
| Infraction Penalties | 5 yards from the line of scrimmage |
| Too Many Players on the Field | 5 yards from the line of scrimmage |