



City of Mesa Youth Sports FLAG FOOTBALL RULEBOOK Fall 2024

Due to the goal of our league and the nature of kids still trying to understand the concepts of the game, it is unrealistic for our referees to call absolutely every violation. We ask everyone to please be patient with our referees. They truly want to help the kids so will be both guiding and officiating them. The first game will be officiated with a little more leniency so the kids can get acclimated to the league and game. Games will be officiated as fair as possible while still allowing flow and continuity to the game without constant stoppage. This is to help ensure the kids enjoy the playing experience as much as possible.

(NFL Flag Football Rules will be followed and enforced unless otherwise noted below.)

Section 1: League Divisions

- Co-Ed 7 8-year-olds
- Co-Ed 9 10-year-olds
- Co-Ed 11 14-year-old

Section 2: Team Composition and Equal Playing Time

- All teams will have approximately 10 players
- All teams play 6 vs 6. But games can start with the minimum 5 players.
- This league is an equal play league. This means equal opportunity to participate in playing time. No participant may play 3 quarters until everyone has played 2 quarters. No participant may play 4 quarters until everyone has played 3 quarters. The only exception to this is if players have repeated absences from practices and games in which coaches are allowed to play less than equal according to the Equal Play and Attendance Policies. Referees and parents should be notified in advance.
- Coaches are responsible for creating practice and game plans that allow for a rotation of players through multiple positions throughout the season so they can gain experience.

Section 3: Equipment

- 7-8 years old Pee Wee size ball
- 10-9 years old Junior size ball
- 11-14 years old -Youth size ball
- Game balls and flag belts provided by City of Mesa Youth Sports
- Mouthpieces encouraged not provided

Section 4: The Field Specs and Dimensions

- Field- 30 yards wide x 70 yards long total with two 10-yard end zones on each end. The 25-yard line will be at midfield and that is the first down yard line for each team.
- All measurements are approximations. Fields may be adjusted to meet the needs of the league and facility.
- No Run Zones are in place to prevent teams from conducting power run plays. They are 5-yard imaginary zones before the 1st down line and the end zone (these zones will be marked with color coded cones). While in the no run zones, teams may not run the ball in any fashion. All plays must be passing plays.
- Stepping on the boundary line is considered out of bounds.

• Each offensive squad approaches only two No-Run Zones in each drive (one zone 5 yards from midfield to gain the first down, and one zone 5 yards from the goal line to score a touchdown).

Section 5: Uniform

- Athletic shoes or plastic cleats are required for safety reasons. No screw-in or metal cleats allowed. Inspections will be made.
- Participants will receive an NFL Flag jersey at their first game. This jersey must be worn to each game. If the jersey is lost or forgotten, the player/coach must notify the referee prior to the start of the game. (they will receive a loaner Penny jersey)
- Uniform shirts must be worn on the outside layer of all clothing and must be tucked in.
- No jewelry except medical alert items. Earrings cannot be taped.
- All players are encouraged to wear a mouthpiece.
- Pants or shorts with belts loops or pockets must be taped. This is to avoid injuries.
- Players may tape their forearms, hands and fingers. Players may wear gloves, elbow pads, and knee pads. Braces with exposed metal are not allowed.

Section 6: Regular Season Games

- Games will start on time as scheduled and if the game cannot begin due to waiting for coaches, players or teams. A maximum delay of 10 mins will start until the minimum player count is reached. Players and coaches are expected to arrive early to prepare and be ready to play on time.
- Postponed games may or may not be rescheduled depending on availability in the season and are at the discretion of the league director.
- Forfeited games will not be rescheduled. If both teams fail to show up to their scheduled game, then the game will be called a draw.
- The home team will be listed first on the schedule.
- A coin toss will determine who is receiving and kicking the away team calls it.

Section 7: Volunteer Coaches

- Abide by the Coaches' Code of Ethics, Coach Handbook and League Rulebook
- At least one approved coach must attend all practices and games. If unable to attend a
 practice or game, they must contact the league director in advance to make other
 arrangements.
- Only the approved coaches who have been cleared by the league director and completed the requirements may coach a team during games and practices as well as be on the team bench and team sidelines. This is for safety reasons.
- Volunteer coaches will be given a team shirt at their first game. This shirt must be worn to each game.
- Only two coaches per team may coach a team.

Section 8: Sidelines: Coach Placement, Team Bench, and Safety Line

- The designated team benches shall be on the same side of field with one team per half. The designated team sidelines are for staff, cleared and approved volunteer coaches, and registered players only. Team bench selection is, first come first serve.
- Teams in the 7 and 8's age division may have two coaches stand on the sideline during play to instruct players OR may have 1 coach on the sideline and one coach on the field. Coaches on the field may not stand in front of the opposing team's bench or in the middle

- of players. All efforts should be made to stay off to the side to not interfere with players or the game.
- Coaches in the 9 and 10's, 11 and 14's age divisions must remain on the sideline. Coaches may not stand on the field or cross midfield to the opposing team's bench and sideline.
- A coach may stand during play to instruct players in a non-disruptive manner and may stand and move about their designated bench to speak to players. Acts deemed disruptive by the referee shall be sanctioned. Examples of disruptive/unsportsmanlike act shall include but are not limited to loud or abusive language, comments to official(s), comments to opposing teams, throwing of objects, displaying disgust in an overt manner or interfering with proper officiating of the game.
- At all divisions, the referee has the right to request that any coach be seated or to move if he/she feels it is in the best interest of the players and the match.
- A cone line is marked ten feet from each sideline. All participants, coaches, parents/guardians and spectators must always stay behind this dashed line during the game for safety reasons.
- Parents/guardians and spectators are not allowed on the playing field, team sidelines or bench area. They must remain on the spectator sidelines.
- Parents/guardians and spectators may not run up and down the sidelines. Find a comfortable place to sit or stand and enjoy the game.

Section 9: Sportsmanship and Conduct

- Youth Sports takes sportsmanship very seriously. All players, coaches, parents and spectators must demonstrate positive sportsmanship and always follow league policies. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action.
- Participants are expected to follow the *Participant Code of Conduct and Guidelines*.
- Spectators are expected to follow the *Spectator Code of Conduct*.
- Coaches are expected to follow the *Coaches' Code of Ethics*.
- Failure to comply with City of Mesa Youth Sports policies may result in the following disciplinary actions: *1st Violation of the Season-Verbal warning from staff. *2nd Violation of the Season-Removal from the game in which it is issued and suspended from the team's next scheduled practice and game. *3rd Violation of the Season-Removal from the game in which it is issued as well as banned from any of the season's remaining practices and games. May also result in unsportsmanlike penalty assessed to spectator's team. No refunds will be given.

*Youth Sports staff reserve the right to immediately remove or ban any person at any time based on the situation, and authorities may be called.

Section 10: Officials and Elasticity Clause

- The league will supply two referees per game.
- Referees shall be granted authority to assess penalties in which coaches, players, and spectators can be ejected from any game.
- Referees will track scores and time for each game. Their scores are considered the official and final scores.
- The flag football rules in this manual do not cover all rules situations that may occur in a game. Those rules and situations not covered in this manual will be governed by commonly accepted flag football rules as understood by the officials.

• Some violations, especially in the 7 and 8's age division, will be called at the discretion of the official to allow for a flow and continuity of the game without constant stoppage. This is to help ensure the kids develop in and enjoy the playing experience as much as possible.

Section 11: League Administration

- All administration will be conducted by City of Mesa Youth Sports.
- City of Mesa Youth Sports has the right to make any changes or additions to the league that they feel are necessary to better benefit the program and its participants.

Section 12: Game Length, Halftime, Timeouts, and Overtime

- Games are played on a 40-minute continuous clock with two 20-minute halves. The clock stops only for timeouts and injuries. Officials can stop the clock at their discretion.
- Halftime is 5 minutes long. Teams switch ends of the field at halftime. They remain on the same bench, but their end zone is at the opposite end for the second half.
- Each time the ball is spotted, a team has 30 seconds to snap the ball. The 30 seconds includes a team's huddle and getting up to the ball before for the snap. Teams will receive one warning before a delay-of-game penalty is enforced. 30 seconds begin after the referee signals a ready whistle after each play.
- Each team has one 60 second timeout per half. Timeouts will not carry over to halves.
- Repeated delays of game may result in a penalty. Delay of game includes taking too much time with game start, huddles, timeouts, in between plays, quarters and halves, and substitutions.
- If the score is tied at the end of 40 minutes, the game will go to *Overtime*.

Section 13: General Rules and Regulations

- At the start of each game, the team who gets the ball first on offense is determined by coin toss. The team that lost the toss gets to decide the direction they want.
- The offensive team takes possession of the ball at its 5-yard line and has 4 plays to cross midfield. Once a team crosses midfield, they have 3 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 5-yard line.
- If the offensive team fails to cross midfield, possession of the ball changes and the opposition starts its drive from its own 5-yard line.
- All possession changes, except interceptions, start on the offense's 5-yard line.
 - 7-14-year-olds: Interceptions in the end zone that are down will be brought out to the 5-yard line. If interception is not returned to end zone, possession begins where runner's flag was pulled.
- Teams change sides after the first half. Possession changes to the team that started the game on defense.

Section 14: Scoring

- Touchdown: 6 points
- PAT (Point After Touchdown): 1-point (5-yard line) or 2-points (10-yard line)
 - o 1-point PAT is passing only 2-point PAT can be run or pass.
 - O A team that scores a touchdown must declare whether it wishes to attempt a 1-point conversion (from the 5-yard line) or a 2-point conversion (from the 10-yard line). Any change, once a decision is made to try for the extra point, requires a charged time out. Decision cannot be changed after a penalty. Interceptions on conversions cannot be returned.
 - o Interception on PAT = the same points as the PAT attempt.
- Safety: 2 points
 - O A Safety occurs when the ball carrier is declared down in his/her own end zone. They can be called down when their flags are pulled by a defensive player, their flag falls off, they step out of bounds, or they hit the ground with their knee or arm. A Safety also occurs when there is an offensive penalty in the end zone.
- Mercy Rule: The mercy rule will come into play to discourage a team from running up the score. The officials may stop tracking the score on the visual scoreboard if a team is winning by 21 points or more
 - This is to help players, coaches and parents redirect their focus off the score and back to having fun and developing in the sport. The officials will continue to keep score on their official scorecard though and may return the score display once they feel it is appropriate

Section 15: 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 as long as 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:
 - o The ball hits the ground.
 - o The ball carrier's flag is pulled off.
 - o The ball carrier steps out of bounds.
 - o A touchdown, PAT or safety is scored.
 - o The ball carrier's knee or arm hits the ground.
 - o The ball carrier's flag falls off.
 - o The receiver catches the ball while in possession of one or no flag(s).
 - o The 7 second pass clock expires.
 - o Inadvertent whistle.

- 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 can choose two options:
 - o Take the ball where it was when the whistle blew, and the down is consumed.
 - o Replay the down from the original line of scrimmage.

Section 16: Running

"NO RUN ZONE" applies.

- o See section 20 on page 9-10 for further details on rushing.
- 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.
 - o "Center Sneak" play NOT allowed but the center may go out for a pass.
- "No-Run Zones," located 5 yards before each end zone and 5 yards on either side of midfield are designed to avoid short-yardage power-running situations. Teams are not allowed to run in these zones if the subsequent line is live. (Reminder: Each offensive squad approaches only two No-Run Zones in each drive one 5 yards from midfield to gain the first down, and one 5 yards from the goal line to score a touchdown).
- 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.
- Offensive players must stop their motion once the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage. **No running with 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.
- The player who takes the handoff can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage,

Section 17: 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.
- Overhand passes that are received behind the line of scrimmage will be considered an illegal forward pass.
- The quarterback has a 7-second "pass clock." If a pass is not thrown within the 7 seconds, it is considered a delay of game.
 - If the quarterback is standing in the end zone at the end of the 7-second clock, the play is dead, line of scrimmage is moved back 5 yards, and loss of down. This is a safety.

Section 18: 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 at least 1 foot inbound when making a reception.
- In the case of simultaneous possession by both an offensive and defensive player, possession is awarded to the offense.
- No blocking at any time
- Laterals beyond the line of scrimmage are allowed. For an illegal forward lateral, the ball will be placed down at the spot where the illegal lateral was made.
- Overhand passes may not be received behind the line of scrimmage; they may only be received parallel or beyond the line of scrimmage.
- Interceptions change the possession of the ball.

Section 19: 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.

Section 20: Rushing the Passer (No rushing in 7-8's)-Skip to section 21.)

- Rushing is allowed in 9-10 & 11-14's aged divisions.
- All players who rush the passer must be a **minimum of 7-yards** (line will be marked by referee) 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 7-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 7-yards from the line of scrimmage. Defensive players should verify they are in the correct position with the official on every play.
- The quarterback can only scramble in the back field if they are rushed, they are NOT allowed to run the ball if they are rushed.
- A legal rush is:
 - o Any rush from a point 7-yards from the defensive line of scrimmage.
 - o A rush from anywhere on the field after the ball has been handed off by the quarterback.

- o 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.
- o If a rusher leaves the rush line early and the ball is handed off before the rusher crosses the line of scrimmage the rusher may legally rush the ball carrier.
- A penalty may be called if:
 - 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 (10-yards LOS and first down).
- Special circumstances:
 - o 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.
 - o 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
- Blocking the pass or attempting to block the pass or contacting the passer will result in a roughing the passer penalty.
- 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 the flag is pulled.
 - o A Safety is awarded if the sack takes place in the offensive team's end zone.

Section 21: Formations

- The offense must have a minimum of one player on the line of scrimmage (the center) and up to 5 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.
 - o 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 Illegal Motion.
- The center must snap the ball with a rapid and continuous motion between his/her legs to a player in the backfield, and the ball must completely leave his/her hands.

Section 22: Conduct and Penalties

- The referee will call all penalties.
- Only the volunteer coach may ask rule clarifications and interpretations. Players and spectators may not question judgement calls.
- Referees determine incidental contact that may result from normal run of play.
- If the site supervisor or referee witnesses any acts of tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, blocking, or any unsportsmanlike act, the game will be stopped, and the player will be ejected from the game. Foul play will not be tolerated.
- Ball carriers must try to avoid defenders with an established position.
- Defenders are not allowed to run through the ball carrier when pulling flags.

- The defense or offense may not mimic the opposing teams' signals, by trying to confuse the opposing players while they are calling out plays.
- All penalties will be assessed from the line of scrimmage, except as noted. (spot fouls)
- Games may not end on a defensive penalty, unless the offense declines it.
- Penalties are assessed live ball then dead ball. Live ball penalties must be assessed before play is considered complete.
- Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal yardage when the penalty yardage is more than half the distance to the goal.

Section 23: Overtime

- Each team gets a PAT possession, if tie then the game goes into a second overtime
- A B B A Format
- Second overtime, same rules as 1st OT
- Third overtime teams can only go for 2pt conversions
- Delay of game = a Loss of Down which will result in a failed try
- Overtime can end with a defensive score
- There is a coin toss for possession
- Dead ball penalties will be assessed on the immediate next try



Defensive spot fouls

Туре	Description	Yardage
Defensive pass interference	The player significantly hinders an eligible receiver's opportunity to catch the ball	Automatic first down
Holding	The player restrains another player who is not in possession of the ball	+5 yards and automatic first down
Stripping	A player smacks or grabs the football out of the ball-carrier's possession	+10 yards and automatic first down

Offensive spot fouls

Туре	Description	Yardage
Screening, blocking or running with the ball	The player uses physical attempts to gain yardage by obstructing the path of their opponent	-10 yards and loss of down
Charging	The player challenges their opponent for space without using their arms or elbows	-10 yards and loss of down
Flag guarding	The ball-carrier intentionally obstructs the defender's access to their flag	-10 yards and loss of down

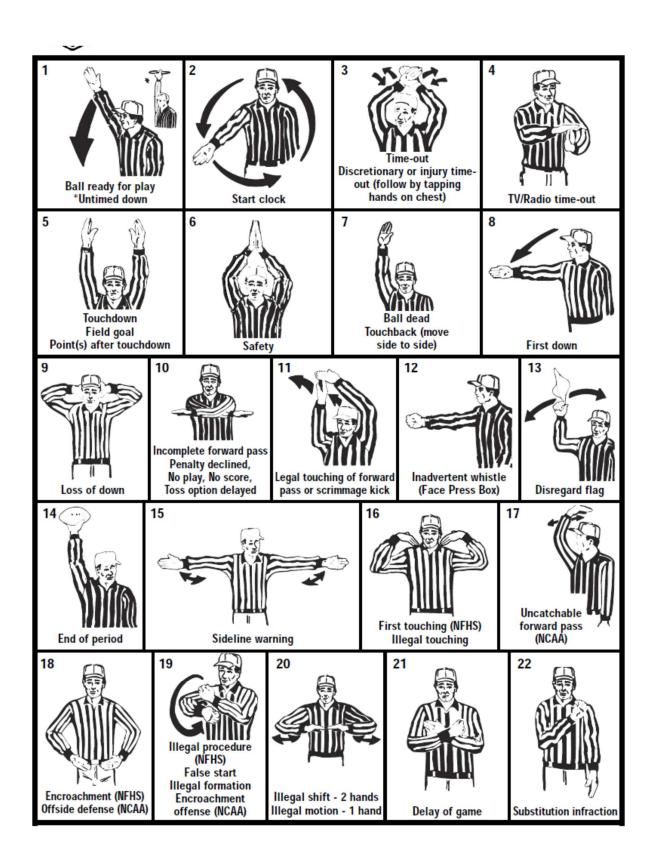
Defensive flag football penalties

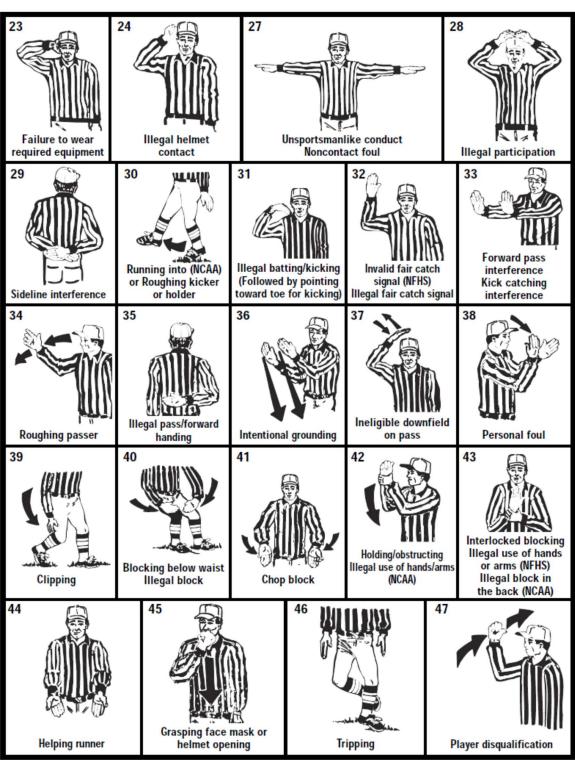
Туре	Description	Yardage
Unnecessary roughness	Using methods beyond what is necessary to pull the flag off the opponent	+10 yards and automatic first down
Unsportsmanlike conduct	Examples include excessive celebration, using abusive language, punching or kicking an opponent	+10 yards and automatic first down
Offside	A player crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped	+5 yards from the line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Illegal rush	The rusher is not lined up at least seven yards off the line of scrimmage	+5 yards from the line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Illegal flag pull	A player pulls the flag off an opponent before they have full possession of the ball	+5 yards from the line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Roughing the passer	A player makes contact with the passer after they've thrown a forward pass	+5 yards from the line of scrimmage and automatic first down

Taunting A type of unsportsmanlike conduct where the player purposely creates ill will between teams	+5 yards from the line of scrimmage and automatic first down
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Offensive flag football penalties

Туре	Description	Yardage
Unnecessary roughness	Using methods beyond what is necessary to pull the flag off the opponent	-10 yards and loss of down
Unsportsmanlike conduct	Examples include excessive celebration, using abusive language, punching or kicking an opponent	-10 yards and loss of down
Offside/false start	A player's charges or moves in a way that indicates the start of the play before the ball is snapped	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Illegal forward pass	A player throws the ball forward once they are past the line of scrimmage	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Pass interference	The eligible receiver significantly hinders the defensive player's opportunity to intercept the ball	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Illegal motion	Players shifting and not coming to a complete stop before the ball is snapped	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Delay of game	Team fails to snap the ball and put it in play	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Illegal procedure	A technical rules violation, such as illegal formation	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down





NOTE: Signals number 25 and 26 are for future expansion