

Flag Football Rules

Denver Metro League

2024

Last Updated: 8/29/2023

FORMAT

- The game is played with seven (7) players. However, a minimum of six (6) players must be on the field at all times. It is the right of the team with 7 players to field a full team regardless of the other team's size. If the coach decides, they can choose to match the 6 players of the other team. The decision must be made before the game and will be unchangeable throughout the game.
- A player may only appear on one roster in a division.
- If a player is found playing on a team illegally, the coach and illegal player may be removed from the league.

PLAYER ATTIRE

- Players are designated as home or away based on the schedule. If the color of the opponents jerseys are not different, the away team will wear pinnies. The home team should be prepared with at least 7 pinnies to share.
- Jerseys must be tucked in at all times. If a jersey is hanging out, flag guarding may be called.
- All players must start each play with their jerseys tucked in, flag belts on, and flags properly secured at the hips of each player.
- Molded and screw-in cleats are permitted. No metal cleats are allowed.
- No jewelry is permitted during the games.
- Shorts and pants cannot have open pockets. If they do have pockets, they must be taped closed.
- Players must have a mouth guard.

EQUIPMENT

- Official game ball will be a Youth Size 8 Football.
- Flag football belts with 3 flags are required (both hips and behind)
 - o The entire belt must tear away, not just the individual flags

COACHES

- All coaches, both offensive and defensive, must move to the sidelines prior to the snap of the ball.

TWO WAY FIELD SET UP

- Playing field will be 74 yards by 35 yards. Each offensive zone will be 30 yards with 7 yard end zones.
- A 5-yard (15 feet) buffer zone is in place during all games. This buffer zone completely surrounds the playing field. This zone assists in maintaining the safety of our players and spectators during game play. Only coaches, players, and league personnel are allowed within this zone during the game. Coaches are asked to assist us with the enforcement of this rule.
- Coaches are required to pick up any trash on the field left by their team.

POSSESSIONS

- A coin toss determines which team takes first possession of the ball. The designated away team for the game will call the coin toss. The winner of the coin toss has the option to begin on offense or defense or choose the side of the field to be used (if the field side is chosen, the team losing the toss will choose whether to be on offense or defense). The team that begins on offense in the first half will begin on defense in the second half.
- Teams switch directions at the beginning of the second half.
- For each possession the offense has three downs with a fourth down option to obtain a first down at midfield, if midfield is obtained, the offense then has four more downs to reach the end zone.
- Fourth down option – On the first half of the field ONLY, a team has a fourth down decision to make. A team may either choose to “GO FOR IT” or to “PUNT”. If a team decides to “GO FOR IT”, they will have one play to cross midfield. If successful with this attempt, a first down will be awarded. If not, the opposing team will take possession of the ball at the point of the failed conversion. If a “PUNT” is decided this will effectively end the drive resulting in a change of possession. The ball will be placed at the 5 yard line and the opposing team will begin their possession. A team may not punt once they have crossed midfield but will have 4 downs to score a touchdown. If the team fails to convert a TD after gaining a first down at midfield, the ball is turned over at either the spot of the ball after the failed attempt or the 5 yard line, whichever benefits the defending team more.
- A first down is only obtained one of two ways; the offense reaches midfield within three downs with a fourth down option or a defensive penalty occurs with the result being an automatic first down.
- If the offense fails to reach midfield (first down line) or fails to reach the end zone on a 4th down attempt, the result is a turnover.

GENERAL OFFENSE

- NO INTENTIONAL CONTACT of any kind is permitted.
- Offense must start with 4 players on the line of scrimmage.
- Non-contact blocking is permitted. The offensive player may move to impede the defender's path to the QB, but may not put their hands or any other body part on the rushing defender.
- Downfield blocking is illegal. Any offensive player who continues running AND impedes the progress of a defensive player who is attempting to pull the ball carrier's flag will be called for illegal blocking.
- The ball must be snapped between the center's legs to start a play. Shotgun snaps are allowed. False hikes are allowed as long as no one on the offense moves.
- There is a 45-second huddle clock, which starts once the line of scrimmage is marked and the ball is spotted.
- Only one player is allowed in motion at a time. All players in motion pre-snap must be parallel to the line of scrimmage and no motion is permitted towards the line of scrimmage. A motioned player does NOT need to stop, prior to the snap of the ball.
- Laterals are not permitted.
- Spinning is permitted.
- Excessive jumping or diving to ADVANCE the ball is illegal. However, an offensive player may jump over a defensive player on the ground to avoid a collision. Jumping or diving to catch a pass is permitted. Excessive jumping is defined as any jumping that could lead to unsafe situations (hurdlings or leaping over defenders as an example) and it is left up to the referee's discretion.
- The ball will be spotted at the location of where the flag was, when it was separated from the belt.

PASSING GAME

- There is only one forward pass per down.
- Passes must be thrown from behind the line of scrimmage, including feet. Failure to comply, results in a loss of down.

RECEIVING GAME

- All players are eligible to receive passes, including the QB, but only if the ball has been handed off behind the line of scrimmage first.
- A receiver must have at least one foot in bounds when making a catch.
- A receiver is down where his or her flag belt is pulled.
 - **Exception:** In order to achieve a first down, or a touchdown, the ball carrier's flag belt and ball, must cross the plane of the first down line and/or goal line.
- If a receiver's flag inadvertently falls off when in possession of the ball, even without contact from another player, that player is ruled down at the spot the flag fell off.
- If a receiver's flag inadvertently falls off prior to receiving the ball and later in the same play catches the ball without replacing the flag, the receiver will be down immediately at the point of reception (this includes defensive interceptions).
- In the event that a receiver and defender both catch the ball at the same time and both retain possession to the ground, then the tie would go to the receiver, with the receiver being down at the point of the tied reception.
- A receiver can't run out of bounds and then come back in bounds to catch a ball.

RUNNING GAME

- Only "direct" handoffs behind the line of scrimmage are legal. Anyone behind the line of scrimmage can receive a handoff. A player must completely let go of the ball, to be considered a legal handoff.
- There is no limit to the amount of handoffs that can be performed by the offense in a single play, so long as the ball never crosses the line of scrimmage.
- The QB can run the ball at any time.
- The player who takes the handoff can throw the ball, as long as he or she does not pass the line of scrimmage first.
- It is the responsibility of the ball carrier to avoid colliding with defenders that lie in his/her path. Unintentional contact will not be penalized, provided the ball carrier makes an effort to avoid it. Failure to attempt to avoid contact with a defender (charging) may be penalized. Intentional contact will not be tolerated, and may also result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty, and/or player ejection.

GENERAL DEFENSE

- NO INTENTIONAL CONTACT of any kind is permitted.

- Defensive players who are rushing the QB must be 5 yards behind the line of scrimmage when the play starts in order to be eligible to defend.
- Defenders must only attempt to grab an offensive player's flags when trying to get them down.
- If a defender attempts to pull an offensive player's flags and inadvertently grabs their jersey, the defender must immediately and completely release the jersey before they can reattempt to pull the flag. Failure to do so will result in a holding penalty.
- All defensive players must give the offense a one yard cushion prior to the snap of the ball.

FLAG PULLING/GUARDING

- 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.
 - A ball may be knocked down on a pass until the receiver has secured the pass. This is at the discretion of the referee.
- A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off of 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 covering the flags with the football jersey.

INTERCEPTIONS

- Interceptions may be returned (except during overtime)
 - If the defender intercepts at the 1 yard line but his/her regular momentum does not carry them into the endzone (touchback) and they are downed within 5 yards of the goal line, the ball will be set at the spot of the downing.
 - If a team is attempting a 4th and goal and they are stopped short of the goal line within 5 yards of the goal, the ball will be placed at the 5 yard line for the other offensive team. This is because the offense is obligated to go for it on 4th and goal and there is no "field goal" option so the defense should not be penalized for causing a turnover on downs. This is considered different from an interception within the 5 yards because the defender has a chance to return the ball.

NO RUN ZONES

- There are no "No Run Zones".

RUSHING OF THE QUARTERBACK

- Individuals who plan to rush (blitz) the quarterback must line up at a minimum of 5 yards from the line of scrimmage.
- Any number of players may rush the quarterback as long as they are behind the line for rushing.
- If the offense draws the rusher(s) to jump the two yard rush line prior to the snap of the ball, that rusher(s) CANNOT rush during that play if they are within the 5 yards when the ball is hiked. However, any other defender that is two yards back may rush instead. Jumping the rush is not considered a penalty until the rusher crosses the line of scrimmage.
- Any contact between a rushing (blitzing) player and an offensive player will result in a penalty against whoever initiates the contact.
- The rusher CANNOT run straight into a lineman who is in a set position, but must adjust their path so as not to make contact.
- If contact is made with a lineman by the rusher a defensive impeding penalty will be assessed.
- Players not rushing the quarterback may defend the line of scrimmage.
- The rusher may attempt to block the pass but it is a penalty to make contact with the quarterback's arm.
- There is no time limit in which the QB must throw the ball.

Inadvertent Whistle

- If there is an inadvertent whistle during a play, the offense has the choice of either the result of the play at the **point** the whistle was blown, or replaying the down. The time that came off of the clock will not be returned.
- If there is an inadvertent whistle during a passing play and the ball is in flight, the down is replayed.
- If the referee rules that a player would have scored when the inadvertent whistle happens, they may award the touchdown.

DEAD BALLS

- A play is ruled dead when the ball carrier's flag is pulled, the ball carrier's flag inadvertently falls off, the ball carrier steps out of bounds, any part of the ball carrier's body other than hands touch the ground, the ball carrier lets the ball hit the ground, a penalty occurs, or after a touchdown or extra point is scored.
- There are no fumbles. The ball is spotted in one of two ways:
 - o If moving backwards, the ball is spotted where it first hits the ground.
 - o If moving forwards, the ball is spotted where possession/control of the ball was lost.
 - o An unintentional fumble may not be intercepted/cause a change of possession.
 - Laterals may be considered intercepted.

SCORING

- A touchdown is equivalent to 6 points.

EXTRA POINTS

- Following a touchdown the offensive team is given an opportunity to score an extra point.
- 1 Extra Point is attempted five yards out from the goal line.
- 2 Extra Points are attempted 12 yards out from the goal line.

SAFETIES

- A safety occurs when one of the following happens: the QB or ball carrier is downed in his/her end zone, the QB or ball carrier runs out of bounds inside his/her end zone, the quarterback or ball carrier fumbles the ball in his/her end zone, a bad snap resulting in the ball landing in the end zone, and an offensive penalty occurring inside the offensive end zone.
- If a safety occurs, the team that scored the safety will be awarded 2 points and will receive the ball on their 5 yard line.

TIME SITUATIONS

- The referee may stop the clock at their own discretion.
- Each team is allowed **one** 60-second timeout per half.
 - o Timeouts do NOT carry over into the next half.
- Games are played with two 20-minute halves and a five-minute half-time.
- The clock will automatically stop at the one-minute warning of the **second half only** if the score of the game is within an 8-point differential. During this period, the clock will also stop for an incompletion, an extra point, when a first down is obtained or if out of bounds.

FORFEITS

- In order to keep the games on time, teams arriving more than ten minutes later than their originally scheduled start time will forfeit the game. However, when said team does arrive, though the game is officially over, both teams may agree to play a scrimmage with the remaining game time.
- Teams are required to have a minimum of six players to play a game; if a team is unable to field at least six players the game will be forfeited. However, if both teams agree, they may use the remaining game time to scrimmage.

MERCY PRECAUTIONS

- A Mercy is declared once a 35 point differential has been obtained. The game is officially declared over.

OVERTIME

- The following overtime rules are to be followed for all games:
 - If the score is tied at the end of regulation, teams move directly into overtime.
 - Coin toss determines possession. The team that did not call the opening coin toss will call the coin toss.
 - Interceptions **can't** be returned in overtime and will result in an immediate change of possession.
 - The team that wins the coin toss has the choice to take the ball first, or defend first. Each team will start from the 12-yard line. They will have two plays to attempt to score.
 - During the first overtime, If a team scores, they may attempt either an extra point or two-point conversion.
 - In the second overtime, after a touchdown a two-point conversion must be attempted. Both teams will drive into the same end zone.
 - The game is over when each team has had possession of the ball an equal amount of times, and one team was able to score more points than their opponents.
 - If the score is still tied after the first overtime, the team that didn't start with the ball in the first overtime will start with the ball for the second overtime.
 - If the score is still tied after the second overtime, teams will go into **Sudden Death** play.
 - For **Sudden Death**, the ball will be spotted at the five yard line and the teams will drive towards mid-field. Each team will be given two downs. The team that gains the most positive yardage from the original line of scrimmage will be declared the winner.
 - The team that was just on defense during the second overtime will start on offense.

PROTEST RULE

- A coach has the right to protest one rule interpretation per game. The head coach **MUST** have a **copy of the rules present** and call a "**Protest Time Out**". The protest must take place before the next play is started. The official must stop the clock and read the rule in question. If no agreeable solution is determined, then the home team athletic director will arbitrate and will have the final say. If a team protests a rule interpretation and is proven wrong, the team will be charged a timeout. If the team doesn't have a timeout then that team will be penalized for delay of game.

GENERAL PENALTY INFORMATION

- If the offense throws an interception and commits an infraction after the interception, when the opposing team takes offensive possession they will get an additional 5 or 15 yards from the line of scrimmage (depending on the infraction).
- Only head coaches may approach the referee. Judgment calls cannot be argued/protested.
- A game or half will not end on any accepted live ball defensive penalty.
- Any offensive penalty in your own end zone results in a safety (2 points).

- A second penalty on an extra point, will equate to the number of points the offensive team was attempting and be awarded.

WARNINGS

- At the officials discretion a warning may be given in place of a penalty to a player or coach for any of the stated rules. Coaches and players should not expect to receive more than one warning if any.

OFFENSIVE PENALTIES - 5 Yards from Line of Scrimmage and Replay of that Down

- False start
- Offsides
- Illegal Formation (not having 4 players on the line of scrimmage)
- Illegal Motion
- Delay of Game
- Too many players on the field
- Offensive impeding (Using any part of your body to intentionally make contact with a defensive rusher)
- Improper equipment - (equipment tampering, lack of mouth guard, pants or shorts with pockets, jersey untucked, illegal cleats, missing or improperly placed flags)

OFFENSIVE PENALTIES - 5 Yards from Line of Scrimmage and Loss of that Down

- Offensive pass interference

OFFENSIVE PENALTIES - 5 Yards from the Spot of Infraction Replay of that Down

- Flag guarding
- Illegal ball advancement – (excessive jumping excessive/diving to advance the ball)
- Intentional contact down field – (blocking, charging, tackling, tripping, pushing, holding, obstructing, stiff arming)

OFFENSIVE UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT - 15 Yards from End of the Play Dead ball foul

- Unsportsmanlike conduct – (using profanity, taunting, insulting or vulgar gestures, disrespectfully addressing any persons, illegally stripping or attempting to strip the ball, spiking or kicking the ball, spiking or throwing flag, fighting, excessive celebrations.) This includes all team members, coaches, and families/fans representing the team.
- Depending on severity of incident, players, coaches, family members, and/or fans may be subject to ejection.

DEFENSIVE PENALTIES - 5 Yards from the Line of Scrimmage, Replay of that Down

- Neutral Zone Infraction (lined up in the neutral zone but not rushing the QB)
- Intentionally causing an offensive player to false start

DEFENSIVE PENALTIES - 5 Yards from the Line of Scrimmage, Automatic First Down

- Roughing the passer
- Unintentionally removing a receiver's flag belt before he/she contacts the ball
- Illegally rushing the quarterback (not remaining 5 yards behind the line of scrimmage)
- Too many players on the field
- Coach interference – (remaining on the field during a play)
- Improper equipment - (equipment tampering, lack of mouth guard, pants or shorts with pockets, jersey untucked, illegal cleats)
- Defensive Pass Interference
- Intentional contact – (blocking, charging, tackling, tripping, pushing, holding, obstructing, stiff arming)

DEFENSIVE UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT - 15 Yards from End of the Play Dead ball foul Automatic First Down

- Unsportsmanlike conduct – (using profanity, taunting, insulting or vulgar gestures, disrespectfully addressing any persons, illegally stripping or attempting to strip the ball, spiking or kicking the ball, spiking or throwing flag, fighting, excessive celebrations.) This includes all team members, coaches, and families/fans representing the team.
- Depending on severity of incident, players, coaches, family members, and/or fans may be subject to ejection.
- INTENTIONALLY removing a receiver's flag belt before he/she contacts the ball.
 - If a flag is pulled prematurely and the receiver possesses the ball and has an **obvious scoring path** to the end zone, the official may signal for a touchdown instead of marking the play down

POTENTIAL EJECTIONS

- Flagrant Unsportsmanlike Conduct or Personal Fouls (Tackling, Pass Interference, and Charging)
- Intentionally Tampering with Equipment
- Bad Sportsmanship
- At the official's discretion, a player or a coach may be ejected from the field for unsportsmanlike conduct or any flagrant violation of the rules. To eject a player or a coach the referee will call an official's time out and get the event liaison **PRIOR** to making this call.
- Any player or coach ejected may be put on probation with possible suspension for the remainder of the event, depending upon the severity of the incident.

SPORTSMANSHIP

- Trash talking is not allowed. Trash talking is offensive language used against opposing coaches, players, officials, league personnel or fans. Disciplinary action may be taken.
- If any league personnel or official witness any act of rough housing, including but not limited to, tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, or any other unsportsmanlike act, the game will be stopped and that player may be ejected. Further disciplinary action may follow including league expulsion.
- After the game, teams are expected to form a line at midfield and congratulate the opposing team regardless of the outcome of the game.