

**2021 Flag Football Rules**  
**Game Rules**  
**Updated: November 4, 2021**

**Teams will Practice for 30 minutes prior to game time. The games will be 2 18-minute halves with a 3 minute Halftime.**

**FIRST POSSESSION**

A coin toss determines first possession. The scheduled home team will call the toss. The offensive team takes possession of the ball at its 5-yard line. The team that does not win the coin toss selects which end zone to defend. Teams change sides after the first half, and possession goes to the team that did not win the toss.

**GAMEPLAY**

Teams are given 3 plays to move the ball from quadrant to quadrant on the field. If a team is successful they are awarded a first down, and are allowed 3 more plays. If after three plays the offense is not able to move to the next quadrant or score a touchdown, possession of the ball changes and the opposition starts its drive from its 5-yard line.

**NEUTRAL ZONE**

A five yard neutral zone will be intact for all plays. The defense must line up at least five yards away from the ball, otherwise an offside penalty will be called. However, when the ball is less than five yards away from the end zone, the defense may line up directly behind the goal line.

Exception: In the 4/5th and Middle School leagues, the neutral zone will be seven yards.

**CHANGE OF POSSESSION**

Whenever there is a change of possession, whether it be an interception or turnover on downs, the team taking over on offense will take possession of the ball at its 5-yard line.

**DEAD BALL**

Play is ruled "dead" when:

- Ball carrier's flag belt is disconnected, ball carrier steps out of bounds, touchdown or safety is scored, at the point of an interception (interception returns are not allowed), ball carrier's body part, other than foot or hand, touches the ground, or ball carrier's flag belt falls off.

**ROSTERS**

**Middle School and 4th/5th Grade games are played with six players per side. Kindergarten/1st Grade and 2nd/3rd Grade games are played with seven players per side.** A minimum of five players is necessary to begin a game. If one team is short players, the other team is not required to play short as well. Teams with enough players may loan players to their opponent if their opponent is short.

All players must be registered with Rec & Ed. Unregistered players will not be permitted to play. Coaches are not permitted to add and/or switch players to the roster. Rec & Ed assigns all players to teams. Any coach playing an unregistered player and/or found switching players will face suspension and/or probation in accordance with the Team Sports Policy on Probation, Suspension, and Hearing Procedures.

## **SIDELINES AND HUDDLES**

Teams are to remain two yards off the touch line. This should facilitate easier substitutions and protect against interference with play. Coaches and team helpers must coach from their own team's sideline.

**Exception:** In the K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade leagues, one coach is permitted in the team huddle on the field and may remain on the field at least 10 yards behind the line of scrimmage. The play clock runs as normal. In the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade leagues, one coach is permitted in the team huddle on the field, but must exit the field prior to the snap. The play clock runs as normal.

## **OFFENSE**

The offense may put one player in motion at the time of the snap. Forward motion at the time of the snap is illegal. Parallel or backward motion is acceptable. A running back may begin forward when in motion, so long as he/she is running parallel or backward to the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.

### **PLAY CLOCK**

- Each time the ball is spotted a team has 25 seconds to snap the ball. Teams will receive one warning before a delay-of-game penalty is enforced.

### **SNAPPING**

- For all grades, players may snap the ball from between the legs or off to one side. The ball cannot be snapped from hand to hand, i.e. There must be some space between the center and quarterback, and the ball must be released by the center before the quarterback takes possession.
- **Exception:** Hand to hand snaps are allowed in Kindergarten/First Grade division.
- If a ball is dropped after the snap it is considered a fumble and the ball is dead. Side snaps are the best remedy for fumbled snaps.
- Center sneaks are not allowed. The ball must be snapped from the center to another player, i.e. the quarterback.

**In the K-1st league and 2-3rd league the center is allowed to snap with one foot in the offside area without being penalized. In the 4-5th and middle school program this will be enforced. The first infraction will be a warning. - Updated 4/26/17**

### **RUNNING**

- Direct handoffs, laterals, and pitches are only allowed behind the line of scrimmage. Offenses may use multiple handoffs behind the line of scrimmage. Stiff arms are prohibited. Violations of this rule will result in a Flag Guarding penalty. The player who takes the handoff can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage. The ball is spotted where the ball carrier's feet are when the flag is pulled, not where the ball is, nor where the flag belt lands.

### **FUMBLES**

- If a player fumbles a ball during play the ball is ruled dead and play stops. The ball is spotted where the ball hits the ground. The ball, however, cannot be fumbled forward. If this happens the ball is spotted at the point where the ball carrier lost possession. A fumble is only considered such if the ball hits the ground. If a ball carrier loses possession while running and the ball is recovered by the opposition before it hits the ground, it is an interception.
- Fumbles that occur in the end zone result in a 2-point safety, and the defensive team takes possession of the ball.

## **PASSING/RECEIVING**

- Teams are only allowed 1 forward pass per play behind the line of scrimmage.
- All players are eligible to receive passes (including the quarterback if the ball has been handed off behind the line of scrimmage). A player must have at least one foot inbounds, without the other being out of bounds when making a reception.
- Both the offensive and defensive players must remain on their feet. Purposely launching one's body is prohibited. Ball carriers must run around any fallen player, they are not allowed to hurdle them.
- **Exception:** Players can jump or dive when making an attempt at a reception/interception.

## **FLAG GUARDING**

- The ball carrier may not guard their flags in any other manner. Spinning is allowed, but players cannot leave their feet to avoid a defensive player. Players must also have their shirts tucked under their belt at all times.

## **SCORING**

- Touchdowns equal to 6 points. An extra point try from the 2 yard line is equal to 1 point, while an extra point try from the 10 yard line is equal to 2 points. There are no kicked extra points or field goals

## **DEFENSE**

### **BLOCKING**

- Physical contact is prohibited. There is no blocking other than offensive screen blocking. Neither the offense nor the defense is permitted to initiate any sort of physical contact. Players must do their best to avoid any contact with opposing players. Penalties will be given for any violations of these rules.
- A screen block is a legal action by a player who, without causing contact, delays or prevents an opponent from reaching a desired position. The screener may face any direction and may only be moving in the same path or direction as the person he/she is attempting to block. The person being blocked is responsible for contact if the screener slows up or stops.

### **RUSHING THE PASSER**

- All players who rush the passer must be a minimum of five yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped. Any number of players can rush the quarterback from the line of scrimmage at the time of the snap. Defensive players should verify they are in the correct position with the official on every play. Players not rushing the quarterback may defend the line of scrimmage.
- **Exception:** In the 4/5th grade and middle school divisions, players must be a minimum of seven yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped to rush the passer.

### **TIME**

All games are to begin on time. Games will be 36 minutes consisting of two, 18 minute halves. Referees shall shorten the game if a team(s) arrive late to ensure the next game starts on time. There is a three-minute break at halftime.

## TIMEOUTS

- Each team has two timeouts per half. Each timeout may last up to one minute thirty seconds. Teams may not carry over timeouts from one half to another. Play is stopped in the case of an injury. Upon noticing or being informed of an injured player the referee must stop play regardless of the situation.

## PLAYING REQUIREMENTS

- Each child must play at least one half of the game. That equals two quarters (a total of twenty minutes). Each child must also sit out one quarter of the game. Playing time does not have to occur in continuous blocks of time.
- **Exception:** If a team has fewer than twelve players present at game time, some players may have their playing time increased due to the insufficient number of players. (The referee should be notified when this occurs.
- Parents should contact Rec & Ed if coaches are not abiding by this rule. Coaches not abiding by this rule may be suspended and/or placed on probation in accordance with the Team Sports Policy on Probation, Suspension and Hearing Procedures.
- Coaches should give their players the opportunity to play different positions throughout the season. Players should have the opportunity to play quarterback if they wish.

## SUBSTITUTIONS

- To maximize participation of all players, frequent substitution is encouraged. A team may substitute any time the play is dead, keeping in mind that the clock only stops running for timeouts.
- As the only official timekeeper, the referee may "add time" if s/he feels a coach is wasting time during substitutions. However, should the referee be forced to add time, the coach must be warned for time wasting upon the first occurrence and cautioned upon the second occurrence.

## WARMUP TIME

- Teams are to warm up prior to their game in a safe area away from the game field. This is to avoid confusion and/or conflict between the game that is being played and players warming up

## EQUIPMENT AND UNIFORMS

Kindergarten through third grades use a peewee football. Fourth and fifth grades use a junior football. Sixth through eighth grades use a youth football. The home team will furnish the game ball.

Players may wear athletic cleats (metal spikes are not allowed), but sneakers are sufficient. Mouth guards are mandatory. Referees will conduct an equipment check before each game.

All players must wear shorts/pants that do not have pockets to minimize finger injuries.

All players must wear their team shirt during league games, and shirts must be tucked under the flag belt at all times. If a player is not wearing his or her team shirt, s/he is not allowed to play. In cold weather, sweatshirts or jackets may be worn under the team shirt.

**Exception:** If a player is injured, blood stained clothing must be removed. If the injured player is able to continue playing, he/she may play in a shirt other than the team shirt.

## **JEWELRY**

Most exposed jewelry is illegal. Rings, watches, bracelets (friendship included), earrings, chains, or necklaces are illegal with the following exceptions.

- Starter earrings or studs may be worn on newly pierced ears if they are covered with tape or a bandage to the satisfaction of the official.
- A religious medal may be worn if it is taped to the body and worn under the uniform.
- Medical alert bracelets or necklaces may be worn if they are taped to the body so the medical alert information still remains visible and accessible if needed.
- Body piercings not visible to the official are not of concern. If the piercing becomes visible, the official must order the player to remove it.

## **HAIR ACCESSORIES**

Any hair accessory made of metal or hard plastic such as barrettes, hair clips or bobby pins are illegal and may not be worn. However, a player may wear hair beads as long as the hair is tied in a tight bun or adequately covered by a hair net to the satisfaction of the official. Players may wear a headband. The headband must be worn on the forehead/crown and can not exceed a maximum of 2". Under no circumstances are players in any Rec & Ed youth sports program allowed to wear bandanas but skull caps are permitted.

## **CASTS, SPLINTS, BRACES AND PROSTHESES**

In Rec & Ed flag football leagues casts, splints, and braces may be worn on the lower extremities as long as they are padded with at least ½" of closed-cell, slow-recovery rubber or other material of the same minimum thickness and having similar physical properties. No casts, splints or braces may be worn on the upper extremities.

No protective equipment shall have exposed metal or hard material.

Prosthesis may be worn as long as the official determines the prosthesis is no more dangerous to players than the corresponding human body part.

It is the responsibility of each coach to inform players and their parents whenever a player is guilty of an infraction of the Youth Sports Equipment and Apparel Rule. Any player who is in violation of the rule may not participate in any Rec & Ed contest until the player is in compliance with the rule. If a player can not comply with the Youth Sports Equipment & Apparel Rule without significant delay, another player must substitute in for the player or the offending player's team must play short. Note that a player who leaves the game to remove jewelry or illegal apparel may be re-entered as a legal substitute once he/she complies with the equipment and apparel rule.

## **INJURIES**

As soon as the referee's attention is called to a player who is bleeding, s/he must stop the game immediately. The injured player must leave the game at that point and be substituted for. The injured player must have the wound cleaned, the bleeding stopped and the wound covered before being allowed to re-enter the game. Any blood stained clothing must be removed as well.

If the player has hit their head, concussion protocol should be followed.

The site supervisor must be informed by a coach of any injury severe enough to require an ice pack or removal from the remainder of the game. In such a circumstance, an incident form should be filled out by the coach and site supervisor. If no site supervisor is present, the coach should fill out an incident report and send it [bairley@a2schools.org](mailto:bairley@a2schools.org) within 24 hours.

## **SPORTSMANSHIP**

Coaches must emphasize good sportsmanship and behavior before, during and especially after the game. All players and coaches must participate in the postgame handshake. If a player is spotted not completing the handshake, they may be warned by the site supervisor or official and offered a second chance to shake hands. If they refuse, the player may be suspended for the following game. Parents, coaches, and referees should contact Rec & Ed if players and/or coaches are not properly demonstrating sportsmanship. Coaches and players not demonstrating sportsmanship may be suspended and/or placed on probation in accordance with the Team Sports Policy on Probation, Suspension and Hearing Procedures.

Players and/or coaches who in the opinion of the referee persistently infringe the laws of the game, show dissent toward a referee, or display unsportsmanlike conduct will be cautioned by the referee.

Players and/or coaches who in the opinion of the referee display violent conduct, serious foul play, foul or abusive language or who commit a second cautionable offense will be ejected. A substitute may replace an ejected player or coach.

Disparaging language or communication (whether verbal or non-verbal) will not be tolerated from players, coaches or spectators. Should the referee hear or see such communication sanctions will be enforced per the guidelines of the "laws of the game". Should a referee be informed that such communication has and/or is taking place, s/he should call both coaches together and ask them to address sportsmanship with their respective players and spectators. An official may call the game at any point if they feel spectators are getting out of hand and the coaches have not been able to control their fans.

Parents and other spectators shall remain behind the teams and/or at least two yards off the touch-line on either side of the field. Spectators may be removed from the playing area, if their conduct or language is deemed unsportsmanlike by the referee.

No person, coaches included, shall stand on either end of the field or along either goal line. No person, coaches included, will be allowed to run the length of the field except players of the game.

## **CANCELLATIONS, FORFEITS AND MAKEUP GAMES**

Games are occasionally cancelled due to inclement weather. If Rec & Ed cancels all games throughout the city on gameday, you may call the Rec & Ed Weather Hotline at 994-2300 ext. 53115 after 7:30 am the morning of the game, or you may check our website: <http://aareced.com>. If Rec & Ed cancels all games throughout the city on Sundays, announcements will be made between 11:00 am and 2:00 pm.

Referees also have the authority to cancel games if weather or field conditions are not suitable for play. Department personnel and the referee are the only officials authorized to cancel games.

Note: When a weather watch or weather warning is issued for Washtenaw County, during game times, games are cancelled for the day. If a weather watch or weather warning is issued for Washtenaw County between 4:00pm and 6:00pm during the weekdays, all practices will be cancelled.

When thunder is heard or lightning is seen, games must be immediately suspended. Officials, players, and spectators should seek appropriate shelter during the delay. Officials must not resume play until thunder has not been heard and lightning has not been seen in the local sky for 30 minutes. The occurrence of thunder and lightning is not subject to interpretation or discussion. Thunder is thunder, and lightning is lightning.

Games will be forfeited in the event that a full team is not present. In this event, the referee will declare the forfeit.

If all games are cancelled on a Sunday, Rec & Ed will officially reschedule those games. Coaches will be notified of the make-up date by mail or telephone. In the event that the referee cancels a game, Rec & Ed will not officially reschedule that game(s). However, if both coaches wish to reschedule that game, they may do so during the week, (possibly during a practice time at their own convenience). Rec & Ed will not schedule a referee for this scrimmage.

If teams wish to reschedule games after the original schedule is mailed a \$30 rescheduling fee will be assessed.

### **PENALTY SUMMARY CHART**

#### **INFRACTION**

#### **PENALTY**

#### **DEFENSE**

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| Offsides                                     | 5 yards (dead ball)                                      |
| Illegal Contact                              | 10 yards + automatic First Down                          |
| Illegal Flag Pull (before receiver has ball) | 5 yards + automatic First Down                           |
| Pass Interference                            | 10 yards (from line of scrimmage) + automatic 1st Down   |
| Diving                                       | 10 yards + automatic 1st Down                            |
| Unsportsmanlike Conduct                      | 15 yards (from the spot where the next play will begin)* |

#### **OFFENSE**

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|---|---|
| Illegal Motion (more than one person moving, false start, etc.) | 5 yards   |
| Illegal Forward Pass  | 5 yards + loss of down (dead ball)                      |
| Offensive Pass Interference                                     | 10 yards (from line of scrimmage) + loss of down        |
| Flag Guarding (includes illegal blocking)                       | 10 yards (from the spot of the foul)                    |
| Delay of Game (1 <sup>st</sup> time is a warning)               | 5 yards + loss of down                                  |
| Diving  | 10 yards + loss of down                                 |
| Unsportsmanlike Conduct   | 15 yards (from the spot where the next play will begin) |

All penalties are from the spot of the foul, unless otherwise indicated.

\* If the next play is to begin behind the original line of scrimmage, the defensive unsportsmanlike conduct penalty will be enforced from the original line of scrimmage

**NFL Flag rules govern league play, except where modified by Rec & Ed's  
Youth Flag Football League Rules.**

If you have questions or concerns about these rules, please contact Willie Pickvet at [pickvetw@a2schools.org](mailto:pickvetw@a2schools.org)