

City of La Porte Parks & Recreation Youth NFL Flag Football Rules

DIVISIONS: The specification for divisions will be based on a player's GRADE in the current school year. Every effort will be made to create 3 league divisions, however these divisions are not concrete and can be modified.

1. K – 1st GRADE
2. 2nd – 3rd GRADE
3. 4th – 6th GRADE

ROSTERS: Teams should consist of 8 – 12 players. The league coordinator will attempt to form teams as evenly as possible in terms of the number of players on each roster.

UNIFORMS:

1. The league will provide NFL Flag reversible jerseys that must be worn for games.
2. All jerseys must be tucked in and flags must be worn on the hips (sides).
3. Shorts can NOT have pockets (injury prevention).
4. Shorts do not have to match.
5. No jewelry is allowed. The game officials may ban any jewelry, equipment or accessory that they deem as unsafe or illegal.
6. Athletic shoes are required for play, no cleats with metal spikes are allowed, rubber only.

EQUIPMENT: Game & Practice footballs will be provided to each team by the league. Pee-Wee footballs may be substituted, but will not be provided by the league.

NFL flag belts with 2 flags will be provided for each player.

Each team/coach will be provided 1 – 2 practice balls for the season.

Practice balls may be used as a team's official game ball (granted referee approval).

THE FIELD: Field will be 30 yards wide and 60 yards long (goal line to goal line) with 8-yard end zones.

THE BASICS

- A coin toss called by the home team determines the first possession. Winner of coin toss can choose offense or defense first. The team that starts on defense will get the ball to start the 2nd half. The loser of the coin toss chooses which end of the field they wish to defend to start the game.
- The offensive team takes the ball on the 5 yard line and has 4 downs to cross midfield for a 1st down. Once a team crosses midfield, it has 4 more downs to score a touchdown. If the offense fails to score, the ball changes possession and the new offensive team takes over 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 at the offense's 5 yard line. Interceptions may be returned for yardage or scores.
- Teams change sides after the first half. Possession goes to the team that began the first half on defense.
- All games are played 5 on 5. Teams cannot play with fewer than 4 players on the field.
- Each team and spectators are required to sit/stand on opposite sidelines.
- One coach is allowed on the field during team huddles on both offense and defense. For Grades K – 3, the coach may remain on the field during play but cannot interfere with the players or plays in any manner. For Grades 4 – 8, the coach must leave the field of play before the ball is snapped. Coaches/Spectators cannot interfere with the referees running the sideline.

TIMING

Games will consist of two 20-minute halves with a running clock. Each team may take up to two 30-second time outs per half. First half timeouts DO NOT carry over to the second half.

The clock does not stop unless a team calls time out, an injury occurs, a defensive delay of game penalty is called, or the referees need to stop the clock for discussion. If a time out is called after a touchdown, the clock will not run on the extra point try.

No overtime play and games can end in a tie.

PLAY CLOCK

A 30-second play clock will be in effect. The 30 seconds starts once the referee has spotted the ball on the line of scrimmage for the next play. First delay of game offense will be a warning. After one warning, the team will be flagged for delay of game which is a 5-yard penalty and loss of down. Referees should give a 10-second warning to teams before the play clock expires.

SCORING

Touchdown = 6 points (player's feet must break the plane of the goal line)

Extra point

1 point – played from the 5 yard line and must be a passing play

2 points – played from the 15 yard line and can be a run or pass

Safety = 2 points (flag pulled in the end zone and includes when the ball hits the ground in the end zone)

RUNNING

- The quarterback cannot run the ball past the line of scrimmage on the snap (QB = player who takes the direct snap).
- After the QB has pitched or handed the ball off to another player, the QB then becomes eligible to RUN or RECEIVE the ball during that play.
- All handoffs must show a clear exchange of the football between quarterback and teammate. Failure to do so will result in the play being blown dead and loss of down.
- Offense may use multiple handoffs or laterals BEHIND the line of scrimmage.
- “No-run zones” located 5 yards from the end zone and 5 yards from the midfield line are designed to avoid short yardage, power running situations. If the ball is spotted within these zones or on the line itself, the next play must be a pass play.
- A player who takes a handoff from the QB can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage or run the ball.
- Once the ball has been handed off by the QB, all defensive players are eligible to rush into the backfield. Rushing into the backfield before the QB has released the ball is a defensive penalty.
- Spinning is allowed, but players cannot leave their feet to avoid a defensive flag pull (no diving or jumping up in the air).
- The ball is spotted where the ball carrier’s feet are when the flag is pulled, not where the ball is.
- Absolutely no laterals or pitches after the ball crosses the line of scrimmage.
- The center is NOT eligible to run the ball. The center can only go out for a pass.
- Ball carriers must make an effort to avoid defenders with established position. Running over a defender with established position is an offensive penalty.

BLOCKING

No Blocking Allowed! Any moving block or attempt to block will be a penalty against the offense. Teammates of the ball carrier cannot impede defenders from pulling flags down field after the ball carrier has crossed the line of scrimmage. This means that all other offensive players should stop moving once a ball carrier has crossed the line of scrimmage or a receiver has caught a pass.

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 when the ball is snapped. That motion must be lateral or parallel to the line of scrimmage. Any motion forward or towards the line of scrimmage at the snap is illegal motion. A receiver must have at least one foot in bounds when making a reception. If both a receiver and a defender catch a ball simultaneously with each having “control” of the ball, **tie goes to the receiver.**

PASSING

The ball must be snapped between the legs by the center. (Exception: See K – 1st Grade Rule)

Shovel passes are allowed behind the line of scrimmage.

The QB has a 7-second “pass clock” that will be counted out loud by the referee. If the QB does not release the ball within 7 seconds, the play is blown dead and loss of down. Once the ball is released by the QB (including hand-offs), the 7-second rule is no longer in effect and the verbal count by the referee should stop for the remainder of the play.

Once a forward pass is thrown, the ball may not be handed off, pitched, or thrown again on the play – even if the initial forward pass & catch takes place behind the line of scrimmage.

If the QB’s throwing arm is in forward motion when his flag is pulled, the pass is allowed.

INTERCEPTIONS

May be returned for yardage and/or scores. Once a ball is intercepted, the play continues until the play is blown dead (See ‘Dead Balls’ below). In addition, the defensive players may NOT run with the interceptor or block once the pass has been intercepted (the same offensive rules apply to the team that has intercepted a pass). If this occurs, the play will be ruled dead by penalty.

Interceptions on extra point attempts cannot be returned.

DEAD BALL

Play is ruled “dead” when:

- Ball carrier’s flag is pulled.
- **If the ball carrier is missing a flag or has a flag in the wrong position (not on hips), the defender must simply touch the ball carrier to end the play.**
- Ball carrier steps out of bounds.
- Ball carrier’s knee, torso, or elbow hits the ground.
- Ball hits the ground (including fumbles and/or bad snaps).
- An offensive penalty occurs.
- QB pass clock expires.
- Touchdown, extra point, or safety is scored.

There are no fumble recoveries. The ball is spotted where the ball hits the ground if fumbled by a ball carrier, or if the snap hits the ground.

In case of an inadvertent whistle by the referee that blows the play dead, the offensive team will have the option to take the ball where the play was blown dead, or replay the down. Referees should **never** blow a play dead on a **defensive** penalty until after the play has fully concluded.

RUSHING THE QUARTERBACK

Rushing the quarterback is allowed under the following conditions:

- Any rusher of the QB must start at least 10 yards from the line of scrimmage at the snap of the ball.
- The referee will mark off the 10-yard starting point.
- Defense may only rush one player.
- If a rusher crosses the 10-yard mark before the ball is snapped, he must retreat back behind the mark in order to rush the QB.
- If a player rushes the QB and was not at least 10 yards back, the defense will be called for a penalty if the rusher crosses the line of scrimmage while the QB still has the ball.
- A rusher may put his hands up in the air to deflect a pass, but any contact made with the QB's arms or hands will result in a defensive penalty for illegal contact. To avoid this type of penalty, the rusher should be going for the QB's flag.
- QB's that are rushed still cannot run the ball past the line of scrimmage.
- 7-second pass clock remains in effect.

PENALTIES

All penalties will be announced and marked off by the referees. Most (not all) are marked off from the line of scrimmage. All penalties may be declined by the opposing team.

Defensive Penalties

Offside = 5 yards from line of scrimmage and replay the down.

Pass Interference = 10 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down.

Illegal Contact with Ball Carrier (Holding, pushing, tripping, etc.) = 10 yards **from spot of foul** and automatic first down.

Illegal Contact with Non-Ball Carrier = 10 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down.

Illegal Flag Pull (Pulling the flag before a receiver catches the ball) = 10 yards **from spot of foul** and automatic first down.

Illegal Rush into the Backfield (Before QB has released the ball) = 5 yards from line of scrimmage and replay the down.

Illegal Rush of the QB (Rushing inside of 10-yard marker) = 5 yards from line of scrimmage and replay the down.

Defensive Delay of Game (Defense moves the ball after referee has spotted the ball) = 5 yards from line of scrimmage and clock stops at discretion of referee.

A defensive penalty on an extra point try may sometimes result in ‘half the distance’ and replay the try depending on the penalty and where the ball is spotted.

Offensive Penalties

Illegal Motion / False Start (More than one person moving at snap, moving forward at snap, false start, etc.) = 5 yards from line of scrimmage and replay the down.

Illegal Forward Pass / Illegal Pitch (Pass or lateral thrown by someone who already crossed the line of scrimmage) = 5 yards from line of scrimmage for QBs and loss of down / 5 yards **from spot of foul** for ball carriers and loss of down.

Illegal Rushing Play (Hand off and rush inside the no-run zone) = 5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down.

Offensive Pass Interference (Illegal pick play, push away defender) = 10 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down.

Flag Guarding (Preventing a flag pull by using ones hands or arms to block/cover the flag, pushing away the defender, or jumping/diving to avoid a flag pull) = 10 yards **from spot of foul** and loss of down.

Note: If the offense has obtained a 1st down prior to committing a flag guard, the offense will be awarded the 1st down before the penalty yardage is marked off and the offense cannot obtain another first down.

Illegal Blocking (Moving use of hands, arms, feet, legs or torso to block an opponent) = 10 yards **from spot of foul** and loss of down.

Note: Teammates cannot run with the ball carrier if it impedes the defense from getting to the ball carrier. That is considered illegal blocking.

Note: If a player has obtained a 1st down prior to an illegal block, the offense will be awarded the 1st down before the penalty yardage is marked off and the offense cannot obtain another first down.

Delay of Game (30-second play clock expires before the ball is snapped) = 5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down.

Any offensive penalty on an extra point try results in a dead ball and loss of down. No retry.

A half or game cannot end on a defensive penalty unless the offense declines it.

If penalty yardage cannot be fully marked off before reaching the goal line, then a “half-the-distance” penalty will be marked off.

ROUGH PLAY / SPORTSMANSHIP

If the referee witnesses any intentional acts of tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, blocking or any unsportsmanlike act (including trash talking and foul language), the game will be stopped and the player may be ejected from the game. **FOUL PLAY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED!**

Referees determine incidental contact that may result from normal run of play. Do not argue judgment calls with the officials.

Referees may call 10-yard + automatic first down penalties on coaches for unsportsmanlike behavior, or for excessive arguing of calls. Coaches should never argue with each other or with other parents during games. Coaches should never engage with opposing players in any type of non-supportive manner. Coaches are subject to suspension for unsportsmanlike behavior!

If a player or coach is ejected, they are subject to review by the league coordinator and face possible suspension for the next game, or even the remainder of the season.

SPECIFIC RULE FOR K – 1ST GRADE ONLY

This division will use a Coach QB. The Coach QB does not wear flags and does not count as one of the 5 players on the field. Coach QB has only 7 seconds to get the ball out of his hands. This can be a forward pass, a pitch, or a handoff. The line judge will count the 7 seconds aloud. Teams may use a Player QB if they so choose, but this does not require the other team to do the same. In addition, **Coach QBs are not allowed to try to deceive the defense verbally or by intentionally hiding the ball. Intentional pump fakes over or underhanded are also not allowed.** The sole purpose of the Coach QB is to distribute the ball to all players. In this division, the center may “side snap” the ball to the Coach QB instead of snapping the ball between the legs.

SUBSTITUTION RULE FOR ALL GRADE LEVELS

No player may run or catch the ball on consecutive plays. If this happens, the down must be replayed. In order to keep this from happening, a player that runs or catches the ball on the previous play must automatically sub out for the very next play. An incomplete pass does not count as receiving the ball, and the intended receiver of an incomplete pass does not have to sub out on the next play. If a team only has the minimum number of players present, the player who just ran/caught the ball can be moved to the QB position in order to remain in the game on the very next play. That QB cannot run or receive the ball beyond the line of scrimmage
Purpose: Everyone must be given the opportunity to handle the ball on offense at least once during the game. This can be via throw, run, or catch.