

FLAG FOOTBALL RULES

Revised on March 28, 2023



The National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA) Flag Football Rules, as modified by the State CIF are the official rules for all CIF regular season games and post-season games.

FLAG FOOTBALL RULES
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CIF FLAG FOOTBALL RULES

I. GENERAL RULES:

a. Game Length:

1. 2 – 20 – minute running halves.
2. Halftime will consist of five (5) minutes.
3. Running clock until last 2 minutes of each half. The game clock will start on the snap following the stoppage for notification of 2-minute warning.
4. Each team will have 2-time outs per half with no carry over from the first half to the second half or the second half to overtime.
5. A coin toss determines first choice of options to receive or defer.

b. Field:

1. Width: 30 yards minimum to 40 yards maximum
2. Length: 50 yards minimum to 80 yards maximum + 2 end zones (10 yards each)
3. No-Run Zones are located 5 yards from each End Zone and 5 yards from each line-to-gain.
4. Team Area: 2 yards from each sideline and between the 20-yard markers.

c. Players:

1. Team consists of at least 7 players.
2. Must have at least 7 players to start a game.
3. Minimum of 5 players to play a game.

d. Equipment:

1. Shoes:

- Must be soft pliable upper material (i.e., canvas/synthetic) that completely covers the foot and is attached to a one-piece molded composite bottom (i.e., tennis shoes).
- Turf Shoe or molded rubber cleats only. NO metal cleats, screw in cleats, or baseball cleats allowed.

2. Shirts/Jerseys:

- All jerseys must have numbers on front and back. (6 inches in height on the front and 8 inches in height on the back)
- No identical numbers on the field at the same time.
- Must cover the players' torso.
- Must be long enough to be tucked into pants.
- Must have both a light colored (away) and a dark colored (home) shirt.
- Shirt must be always tucked in.
- Sweats (including hoods) must be worn under the uniform, if worn.

3. Shorts/Pants:

- Must be part of a uniform.
- Uniform may be a flag football, soccer, or lacrosse uniform.
- No Open Pockets
- Spandex and compression shorts may be worn under the uniform.
- No torn shorts or sweatpants.
- The pants or shorts must be a contrasting color than the flags.

4. **Flags:**

- A one-piece flag belt without any knots.
- One flag on each side and one in the center of the back. (3 total)
- Belt flag size is 2 ¼ wide by 14 ½ length.
- Flags may not be altered in width or length and may have no tape on them.
- All players must be wearing a flag before the ball becomes live. Failure to properly wear required player equipment when the ball is about to become live results in a dead ball penalty for Delay of Game.

NOTE: Games will not be played unless both teams have the appropriate flags.

5. **Football:**

- Pebble grained or rubber covered football.
- Must be a youth or intermediate size football.
- The referee shall be the judge of any ball offered for play.

6. **Field Equipment:**

- Score board
- Goal post pads
- Sideline markers and pylons
- Down marker (If possible)

7. **Additional Equipment:**

- Mouth and Tooth Protector: It is **MANDATORY** that all players wear a mouthpiece.
- Sunglasses: Players are not permitted to wear sunglasses
- Hand Warmers: Players may not wear hand Warmers that buckle around the waist
- Wristbands and headwear shall meet the following guidelines: Soft-sided, Rubber, cloth or elastic bands may be used to control hair. Hard items, including, but not limited to, beads, barrettes, and bobby pins, are prohibited.
- Knee & ankle braces are permitted but all exposed hinges must be covered. Most oversleeves recommended by the manufacturer are acceptable. These braces may be padded or unpadded.
- The officials shall not permit any team member to participate while wearing apparel or equipment if in his/her judgment any item is dangerous or confusing to other players, is not appropriate, or constitutes a safety concern.
- A player may not wear jewelry. Religious and medical alert medals are not considered jewelry. A religious medal must be taped and worn under the uniform. A medical alert medal must be taped and may be visible. Additionally, no hanging play cards and no eye shade other than all black.

II. **GAME PLAY RULES:**

➤ **Offense:**

- Blocking: **No Blocking or Screening is allowed at any time**
- NO EXCESSIVE CONTACT will be allowed.

➤ **Passing:**

- The offensive team may NOT throw more than one forward pass per play.
- The offensive team may throw an unlimited number of backward passes during any play.
- No player may throw the ball forward if that player is beyond the line of

scrimmage.

- The QB MAY intentionally ground the ball by throwing the ball into the ground or out of bounds to avoid a sack. If the ball is thrown laterally or backwards it is considered a fumble and the ball will be placed at the spot where the ball crossed the out of bounds demarcation or hits the ground. If the pass is thrown forward it is considered an incomplete pass and will be placed at the previous spot.
- No forward passes are allowed after an interception.

➤ **Snapping:**

- The ball must be snapped from the ground but does not have to be snapped between the legs.
- The ball may be snapped to any person whose feet are at least 2 yards behind the line of scrimmage.
- The person who receives the snap is considered the quarterback for that play.

➤ **Rushing:**

- ALL players are eligible receivers.
- Quarterback can run the ball ONCE per SERIES OF DOWNS.
- There is no limit on the number of times players other than the quarterback can run.
- The PAT shall be treated as a new series (**QB is open**).
- No stiff arming.
- If a defense “blitzes” or rushes multiple defensive players at the quarterback, the quarterback may run without it counting as their one run per series of downs.

➤ **No Run Zone:**

- No-Run Zones are located 5 yards from each end zone and 5 yards from each line-to-gain. No run zones are designed to avoid short-yardage, power-running situations to help avoid blocks/screens & excessive contact. If a penalty or loss of yardage takes a team out of the no run zone (more than 5 yards from end zone or line to gain), that team is then allowed direct hand-offs again.
- QB runs are not allowed in these No Run Zones unless the defense blitzes.
- Direct hand-offs, including a direct hand-off following a forward or backward pass, are not allowed in these No Run Zones.

- **Receiving:**
 - A reception is deemed made if:
 - The receiver possesses the ball before the ball contacts the ground and
 - The receiver has a body part down in the field of play after possessing the ball.
 - The receiver may NOT use their hands or arms to move a defender to make a reception.
 - No stiff arming.

- **Jumping:**
 - A player may not leave her feet to avoid a flag from being pulled.
 - Official will blow the whistle and the player will be down at the spot where she left their feet.

- **Fumbles:**
 - Fumbles are dead as soon as they hit the ground.
 - Forward or backward fumbles will be placed at the spot where the ball crossed the out of bounds demarcation or hit the ground.
 - A fumble caught in the air by either team is a live ball and may be advanced.

- **Defense:**
 - **Blocking: No Blocking or Screening is allowed at any time**
 - NO EXCESSIVE CONTACT will be allowed.
 - **Rushing/Blitzing:**
 - Any defensive players can rush from any position on the field if they are 3 yards behind the line of scrimmage.
 - Teams may only rush up to two (2) players at a time.
 - Rushers must attempt to avoid any offensive players. NO EXCESSIVE contact is allowed.
 - Rusher must avoid hitting the QB's arm, even on the follow through motion.
 - NO limit on the number of rushing attempts (BLITZS) by a team.
 - **Pass Defense:**
 - Receivers are allowed a free release from the line of scrimmage. NO Bump and Run coverage. This is an illegal contact foul - 10-yard penalty. This would be enforced from the end of the related run (running play) or previous spot (pass play).
 - Defenders are not allowed to play through the receiver to make a play on the ball.
 - Interceptions occur if:
 - The interceptor possesses the ball before the ball contacts the ground, &
 - The interceptor has a body part down in the field of play after possessing the ball.
 - If the defense intercepts a pass, they can return the ball for a touchdown. Wherever the flag is pulled is where the new offense will start their first series of downs.

- **De-Flagging/Tackling:**
 - The defender must make a play at the flags. A player may not try to strip, grab or knock free a ball in player possession, including a quarterback prior to passing the ball. If this occurs, it is penalized as an illegal contact foul.
 - When de-flagging the ball carrier:
 - The ball carrier is down at the point when the flag belt comes unclipped, NOT when it falls off.
 - The ball will be spotted using forward progress where the ball is at when the flag comes unclipped, not where the flag may fall.
 - Forward progress is the forward-most point of the ball when de-flagged, if a player is holding the ball out in front of her body, then that's the dead-ball spot where the ball will next be put into play.

- **Kicking:**
 - **Kick-offs:**
 - There will be NO kick-offs.
 - Teams will take possession of the football on their 20-yard line. (10-yard line for 50 yard fields)

- **Punting:**
 - There will be NO punts.
 - On 4th down the offensive team must declare whether they are “punting” or going for the first down prior to expiration of the play clock.
 - If the offensive team declares a “punt” after committing a delay of game foul, the penalty will be enforced at the subsequent dead ball spot.
 - If the offense declares a “punt” the defense will take possession of the football on their 20-yard line. (10-yard line for 50 yard fields)
 - If the offense goes for the first down and does not obtain it, the defense will take possession of the football at that point on the field.

- **Penalties:**
 - **Offense:**
 - **Illegal Contact:**
 - When an offensive player makes excessive contact with a defensive player.
 - No Blocking or Screening
 - 10-yard penalty
 - **False Start:**
 - When an offensive player moves in a way that simulates the start of a play.
 - 5-yard penalty

- **Offensive Pass Interference:**
 - When an offensive player hinders a defensive player's ability to catch a pass by making physical contact with the defensive player.
 - It is forward-pass interference if any player of A, who is beyond the neutral zone, interferes with an opponent's opportunity to move toward, catch, or bat a pass.
 - It is not forward-pass interference if:
 - a. Unavoidable contact occurs when two or more players are making a simultaneous, bona fide attempt to move toward, catch or bat the pass.
 - b. Contact by A is immediately made on a B lineman and the contact does not continue beyond the neutral zone.
 - 10-yard penalty

- **Illegal Forward Pass:**
 - When a player is or has been past the line of scrimmage throws the ball forward or when more than one forward pass is thrown during a play.
 - When a forward pass is thrown after a change of team possession.
 - 5-yard penalty from the spot of the infraction (loss of down, if by offense).

- **Illegal Quarterback Run:**
 - When the quarterback runs the ball more than once per series of downs.
 - 5-yard penalty, loss of down

- **Illegal Shift/Illegal Motion:**
 - When an offensive player in motion moves towards the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped.
 - A maximum of one (1) player off the line of scrimmage is allowed to be moving laterally/backward at the snap of the ball.
 - 5-yard penalty

- **Flag Guarding:**
 - When a player, either intentionally or accidentally, inhibits a player from deflagging them using their hands, arms, etc. (including stiff arming).
 - 10-yard penalty from the spot of the infraction, loss of down.

- **Illegal Formation:**
 - When the offensive team has more than 3 players lined up behind or off the line of scrimmage at the snap.
 - 5-yard penalty

- **Hurdling/Spinning/Diving:**
 - A player may not attempt to jump over an opponent.
 - A player may not spin to avoid a flag from being pulled.
 - A player may not leave their feet and dive in any direction to advance the football.
 - 10-yard penalty.

➤ **Defense:**

- **Illegal Rush:**
 - When a defensive player rushes the QB after being less than 3 yards behind the line of scrimmage at the snap.
 - When more than two (2) players rush at a time.
 - 5-yard penalty
- **Illegal Contact:**
 - When a defensive player makes excessive contact with an offensive player.
 - A player may not run through the ball carrier when pulling a flag.
 - 10-yard penalty
- **Illegal Flag Pulling:**
 - A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off a player who has not touched the ball.
 - 5-yard penalty, automatic first down.
 - Run Play - enforced from end of run
 - Pass Play - Complete - enforced from end of related run
 - Pass Play - Incomplete - enforced from previous spot
- **Roughing the Passer:**
 - When a defensive player contacts the QB while the QB is in the throwing motion or has just completed the throwing motion. This includes hitting the QB's arm after they have released the ball.
 - 10-yard penalty, automatic first down.
- **Defensive Pass Interference:**
 - When a defensive player hinders an offensive player's ability to catch a pass by making physical contact with the offensive player.
 - It is forward-pass interference if any player of B, who is beyond the neutral zone, interferes with an opponent's opportunity to move toward, catch, or bat a pass.
 - It is not forward-pass interference if:
 - a. Unavoidable contact occurs when two or more players are making a simultaneous, bona fide attempt to move toward, catch or bat the pass.
 - b. Contact by B is obviously away from the direction of the pass.
 - 10-yard penalty
- **Defensive Holding:**
 - When a defensive player holds up the offensive player while attempting to de-flag that player.
 - 10-yard penalty
- **Encroachment:**
 - When a defensive player crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped.
 - 5-yard penalty
- **Tackling:**
 - A player cannot tackle the ball carrier.
 - 10-yard penalty

- Sliding:
 - A player may not slide to get the flag.
 - 10-yard penalty

III. Coach and Player Conduct:

- Coaches and/or players who disrespectfully object to a game official's call may be assessed an Unsportsmanlike Conduct penalty.
- No coach, player or substitute shall act in an unsportsmanlike manner once the game officials assume authority of the contest.
- Examples are, but not limited to:
 - Using Profanity, insulting or vulgar language or gestures.
 - Attempting to influence a decision by a game official.
 - Disrespectfully addressing a game official.
 - Failure of a head coach, following verification, to have his/her player(s) wear legal and/or required equipment.
 - Being on the field except as a substitute or replaced player.
- Being outside the team box, but not on the field.
- These actions result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty enforcement, with a second unsportsmanlike conduct foul resulting in disqualification.
 - Unsportsmanlike Conduct penalty enforcement will be treated the same as a dead ball foul with the penalty being enforced from the spot of the ball at the end of the play. A second Unsportsmanlike Conduct foul will result in the coach or player being disqualified for the remainder of the game.
 - Team captains should be the players that address the officials.
 - Fighting is any attempt by a player or nonplayer to strike or engage a player or nonplayer in a combative manner unrelated to football. Such acts include, but are not limited to, attempts to strike an opponent with the arm, hand, leg, or foot, whether there is contact or not.

IV. Scoring:

- **Touchdown:**
 - 6 points
- **Flag Check:**
 - After all scores the player must go to the nearest official for flag check.
 - **Removing a Flag:**
 - Player removing their own flag prior to a flag check will result in no score, loss of down and a warning.
 - Next infraction results in Unsportsmanlike Conduct foul.
- **Tampering with a Flag:**
 - If a player is determined to have tampered with their flag it will result in a loss of down and a warning.
 - Next infraction results in disqualification.

➤ **Point After Touchdown:**

- No kick attempts
- 5 yards = 1 point
- 10 yards = 2 points
- During a PAT attempt, the ball remains live, allowing the intercepting team to return the try for 2 points to the other end of the field.
- Once a team declares their choice for a 1- or 2-point conversion and the ball is declared ready for play by the officials, the team may change their decision only after calling a time-out.
- Point After Touchdown plays will be an untimed down at 2:00 or less in each half. Additionally, when a touchdown is scored and the PAT down has not been played when any half reaches 0:00, the period shall be extended for the PAT down on the same end of the field that the touchdown was scored.

➤ **Safety:**

- 2 points

Miscellaneous Rules:

➤ **Series of Downs:**

- A team in possession of the ball shall have four consecutive downs to advance the ball to the first down line.
- Officials will be responsible for determining the spot of the ball and the down markings.
- A new series of downs will be awarded when a team moves the ball to the next line to gain.
- On fourth down the offensive team must declare whether they are punting or going for the first down prior to the expiration of the play clock.
- If the offense declares a punt the defense will take possession of the football on their 20-yard line. (10 yard line for 50 yard fields)
- If the offense goes for the first down and does not obtain it, the defense will take possession of the football at that point on the field.

➤ **Play-Clock:**

- The 25 second play clock begins once the ball is placed on the ground and the whistle is blown by the referee.
- Delay of game: If a team exceeds the 25 seconds.

➤ **Ball Placement:**

- Any request to place the ball on the left or right hash-mark is ignored. The ball should always be placed in the center of the field. This includes Point After Touchdown.

➤ **Restricted Area:**

- The restricted area is the area extending two yards outside the perimeter of the entire field (i.e., outside both sidelines and end lines). This restricted area is designated by the restraining line. The team box is the area immediately outside the restricted area between the 20-yard lines on each side of the field. With limited exceptions, nonplayers are not permitted in the restricted area at any time during the game. Nonplayers include coaches, team personnel, spectators, game administrators and members of the media.
- During a dead-ball interval, no more than three coaches are permitted in the restricted area directly in front of the team box. No one may be in the restricted area when the ball is live.
- The restricted area is designated to make the sidelines safer for everyone and to allow game

officials ample room to work. If the restricted area is not clearly delineated or not enforced by game administration, coaches or game officials, individuals in the restricted area are at risk for injury during or after a play.

- Coaches are encouraged to instruct team personnel of the parameters and boundaries of the team box, and to effectively communicate the requirements to always stay in the team box. Coaches are also required to remain outside the restricted area when the ball is live, and no more than three coaches are in the coaches' area when the ball is dead.
- Coaches are not allowed on the field to call plays.

➤ **Overtime:**

- In the event the 2nd half ends in a tie, **overtime** will commence.
 - A coin toss shall decide who receives the ball first.
 - Winner of the coin toss can choose to be on offense first, defense first or choose the end of the field that overtime will be played on. The loser of the toss shall exercise the remaining option for the first extra period and shall have the first choice of options for subsequent even-numbered extra periods.
 - Each team will receive one (1) time out per overtime period.
 - Teams will alternate possessions, starting at the 20-yard line. The line to gain is always the goal line regardless of whether a penalty enforcement places the ball more than 20 yards from the goal line to start a new series of downs.
 - Teams may go for 1 or 2 points after a touchdown is scored.
- Each team will have at least one possession during each over time unless B scores first. If team A scores first, team B will be given a series of down from their 20-yard

➤ **Unfair Acts:**

- The Referee has much latitude in handling obviously unfair acts during a game. This would include situations that arise when a team commits a blatant and obvious intentional foul or fouls to gain a clock advantage late in a game. We should treat these intentional fouls as Unsportsmanlike Conduct fouls. Each player committing these unsportsmanlike acts will have a counted unsportsmanlike conduct foul, with 2 unsportsmanlike conduct fouls by a single player or coach resulting in disqualification. The following is a list some other potential intentional fouls that could be committed during the game:
- A player or nonplayer or person(s) not subject to the rules shall not hinder play by an unfair act which has no specific rule coverage.
- No team shall repeatedly commit fouls which halve the distance to the goal line.
- No player shall hide the ball under the jersey.
- Neither team shall commit any act which, in the opinion of the Referee, tends to make a travesty of the game.

➤ **Mercy Rule:**

- If the point deficit is 21 points or more in the second half, a running clock will be utilized.

➤ **Protest:**

- There are no protests.
- All referee decisions are final.
- Interceptions during overtime remain live and can be returned for a touchdown by the intercepting team.
- A winner must be determined (No ties).
- Fouls During a Point After Touchdown or in Overtime After a Change of Team Possession:

- A score by a team committing a foul during the down is canceled. Exception: Live- ball fouls treated as dead-ball fouls.
- If both teams foul during the down and the defensive team had not fouled before the change of possession, the fouls cancel, and the down is not repeated.
- Penalties against either team are declined by rule.

Exception: Penalties for flagrant personal fouls, unsportsmanlike conduct fouls, dead- ball personal fouls and live-ball fouls treated as dead-ball fouls are enforced from the succeeding spot (20-yard line).

Girl's Flag Football

Table of Game Clock Times

PERIOD of TIMING	CLOCK TIME
Game Clock (Varsity)	2- 20-minute running halves
Halftime Intermission	5 minutes
Charged Time-outs	1 minute
Game Clock (JV or Tournament)	2- 15 min running halves
Halftime Intermission	5 minutes
Charged Time-outs	1 minute

STARTING & STOPPING the CLOCK

The clock shall start with the first legal snap of the game and will remain running until the last 2:00 minutes of each half. If there is an official's timeout (i.e., for injury, penalty administration discussion, etc.) that occurs prior to the last 2:00 minutes of each half, the clock shall be stopped during and will then start with the ready for-play signal. If there is a charged team timeout, the clock shall stop and then start with the next legal snap.

2:00 MINUTE TIMING RULES

The clock shall start with the snap (except Point After Touchdown), if the clock was stopped because:

- a. Issue the 2:00 minute warning.
- b. The ball goes out of bounds.
- c. B is awarded a new series.
- d. Touchdown or Safety is scored.
- e. Legal or Illegal forward pass is incomplete.
- f. A request for time-out is granted.
- g. The penalty for delay of game foul is accepted.

NOTE: The clock shall start with the ready-for-play whistle after issuing the 2:00 minute warning if the point deficit is 21 points or more in the second half.

The clock shall be stopped and will start for the ready-for-play signal on a down if the clock was stopped for any reason other than specified above or untimed down:

- a. For official's time-out, other than when B is awarded a new series.
- b. Penalty administration.
- c. There has been no charged time-out.
- d. First down administration.
- e. Because of an inadvertent whistle.

Girl's Flag Football
PENALTY SUMMARY

LOSS of 5 YARDS

Delay of game Illegal substitution Encroachment Snap Infraction False Start

Illegal Formation (more than 3 backs)

Illegal Shift or Illegal Motion

Illegally handing ball forward (loss of down)

Illegal forward pass (by A; loss of down)

Helping runner Sideline Interference

Nonplayer outside of team box Attendant illegally on field

Illegal QB run (also loss of down) Illegal Run in No Run Zone (also loss of down)

Illegal Defensive Rush Illegal Flag Pull (also first down)

LOSS of 10 YARDS

Illegal Blocking/Screening/Holding

Illegal Block in Back Excessive Contact

Offensive/Defensive Pass Interference Flag Guarding (by A; also loss of down)

Hurdling/Spinning/Diving

Roughing the Passer (also first down) Tackling

Sliding Unsportsmanlike Conduct

Unfair Acts

Illegal Unintentional Contact with an official in the restricted area while ball is live

DISQUALIFICATION ASSOCIATED WITH CERTAIN PENALTIES

Flagrant Excessive Contact Fighting by Player or nonplayer

Intentionally Contacting a Game Official Striking, kicking, kneeling

A second unsportsmanlike foul by player or nonplayer

A substitute leaving team box during a fight Second violation of tampering with a flag

Second violation of not wearing Mouth and Tooth Protector