



# *2023 OFFICIAL PLAYING RULES*

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# GAME PLAY RULES

## I. Game

1. At the start of each game, captains from both teams meet at midfield for the coin toss to determine who starts with the ball. The visiting team calls the toss.
2. The winner of the coin toss has the choice of offense or defense. The loser of the coin toss has the choice of direction. Possession changes to start the second half to the team that started the game on defense.
3. The offensive team takes possession of the ball at its 5-yard line and has four (4) downs to cross midfield. Once a team crosses midfield, it has three (4) downs to score a touchdown.
  - a. If the offensive team fails to cross midfield, on 3 downs, and elect to "punt" on 4th down, possession of the ball changes and the opposition starts its drive from its own 5-yard line(6u and 8u divisions). If the offensive team goes for it on 4th down and does not cross field, the opposing team will start its possession from the spot. In divisions 10u and above, they team may elect to punt on 4th down.
  - b. Offensive Teams MUST declare 4th down intent; "Play or Punt", when asked by the referee and prior to the 'Ready for Play'.
  - c. Teams may use a timeout only to change the declaration of "Play" at any time prior to the expiration of the play clock.
4. Teams change sides after the first half. Possession changes to the team that started the game on defense.



## II. Terminology

<b>Boundary Lines</b>	The outer perimeter lines around the field. They include the sidelines and back of the end zone lines.
<b>Line of Scrimmage</b>	(LOS) an imaginary line running through the point of the football and across the width of the field.
<b>Line-to-Gain</b>	The line the offense must pass to get a first down or score.
<b>Rush Line</b>	An imaginary line running across the width of the field seven yards (into the defensive side) from the line of scrimmage.
<b>Offense</b>	The team with possession of the ball.
<b>Defense</b>	The team opposing the offense to prevent it from advancing the ball.
<b>Passer</b>	The offensive player that throws the ball and may or may not be the quarterback.
<b>Rusher</b>	The defensive player assigned to rush the quarterback to prevent him/ her from passing the ball by pulling his/her flags or by blocking the pass.
<b>Live Ball</b>	Refers to the period of time that the play is in action. Generally used in regard to penalties. Live ball penalties are considered part of the play and must be enforced before the down is considered complete.
<b>Dead Ball</b>	Refers to the period of time immediately before or after a play.
<b>Whistle</b>	Sound made by an official using a whistle that signifies the end of the play or a stop in the action for a timeout, halftime or the end of the game.
<b>Inadvertent Whistle</b>	Official's whistle that is performed in error.
<b>Charging</b>	An illegal movement of the ball-carrier directly at a defensive player who has established position on the field. This includes lowering the head or initiating contact with a shoulder, forearm or the chest.
<b>Flag Guarding</b>	An illegal act by the ball-carrier to prevent a defender from pulling the ball-carrier's flags by stiff arm, lowering elbow or head or by blocking access to the runner's flags with a hand, arm or ball.
<b>Shovel Pass</b>	A legal forward pass across the LOS underhand, backhand or by pushing the ball forward.
<b>Lateral</b>	A backward or sideways toss of the ball by the ball-carrier.
<b>Unsportsmanlike Conduct</b>	A rude, confrontational or offensive behavior or language.

# III. Equipment

All players must wear the flag belts and flags provided by the league. All players MUST wear mouth guards at all times while on the field. Game balls should be age specific.

Players must wear shoes. Cleats may not be allowed at certain locations. This will be specified by your league organizer or site director. However, cleats with exposed metal are never allowed and must be removed.

Players may tape their forearms, hands and fingers. Players may wear gloves, elbow pads and knee pads. Braces with exposed metals are not allowed.

Players must remove all jewelry and hard billed hats. Winter beanies are allowed.

Players may wear soft shell helmets and sunglasses but they must be secured at ALL times while on the field.

Players' jerseys must be tucked into shorts or pants if they hang below the belt line.

We recommend players wear shorts or pants that do not have pockets. Shorts or pants with belt loops or pockets must be taped. Games will not be delayed for a player to tape up pockets.

Participants must bring their own official NFL FLAG belts and mouth guards to the field. Extra belts and mouth guards may be available for purchase.

Game balls will be supplied by each team, but must meet the age guidelines printed on the ball.

a. **Flag belts and flags cannot be the same color as the shorts or pants.**

## IV. Field

- Both with a midfield line to gain. No Run zones are located five yards prior to the line to gain and five yards prior to the endzone in the offense's direction.





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## V. Timing and Overtime

Regular Season Games are played on a 40-minute continuous clock with two 20-minute halves, unless one team gains a 35-point advantage which will end the game unless teams agree to continue without changing the score. The clock stops for halftime, injuries and the Officials' discretion.

Halftime is 5 minutes.

Offense has 30 seconds to snap the ball

Each team has (2) 60-second timeouts per half. They do not carry over.

Officials can stop the clock at their discretion.

In the event of an injury, the clock will stop then restart when the injured player is removed from the field of play.

If the score is tied at the end of regulation play, an overtime period will be used to determine a winner. **Overtime format**, when applicable, is as follows:

- a. Home team calls the toss to determine the team that chooses to be on offense or defense first.
  - i. If a second round of overtime must be played, the team that lost the coin toss will get to choose offense or defense for the start of the second round of overtime. This process continues with teams alternating who gets to choose to be on offense or defense to start out during every round of overtime.
  - ii. The referee will determine which end of the field the overtime will take place on.
- b. Each team will take turns getting one (1) play from the defense's 5-yard line for one point or the defense's 10-yard line for two points. Whether to go for one or two points is up to the offensive team. Whether or not the team that begins on offense converts the team that started on defense gets a chance on offense to win or tie by converting a one- or two-point play of their own.
  - i. **Example:** Team A starts on offense and chooses to go for one point from the 5-yard line and is successful. Team B is then on offense and can choose to either go for one point from the 5-yard line to tie and force a second round of overtime or to go for two points from the 10-yard line for the win.
  - ii. If the second team on offense in an overtime round fails to beat or match the team that went first, the team that went first wins.
- c. Starting with the 2nd overtime, both teams must "go for two" from the 10-yard line.
- d. Starting with the 3rd overtime, each team will get 1 play from the 5 yard line going out from the endzone. The team with the most yards will be the winner. The team with the most yards will be awarded 1 point added to their final score.
- e. Final Score will be recorded to include all points scored for each team.
- f. All regulation period rules and penalties are in effect.
- g. There are no timeouts.
- h. Interceptions are returnable in OT, and worth 2 points.
  - i. Interceptions returned for a score in the first or second overtime period, the game is over.
  - ii. Interceptions advanced in the third overtime period, the game is over.



## VI. Scoring

1. **Touchdown:** 6 points
2. **PAT** (point after touchdown) **1 point** (5-yard line) or **2 points** (10-yard line)
  - a. Note: 1 point PAT is pass only; 2 point PAT can be run or pass.
3. Interceptions returned for scores during regular game play are worth six points, conversions or overtime are worth two points
3. **Safety:** 2 points
  - a. A safety occurs when the ball-carrier is declared down in his/her own end zone. Runners can be called down when their flags are pulled by a defensive player, a flag falls out, they step out of bounds, their knee or arm touches the ground, a fumble occurs in the end zone or if a snapped ball lands in or beyond the end zone.
4. 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 timeout. A decision cannot be changed after a penalty.
5. After one team is winning by 35 points or more, the game is over. TEAMS may elect to continue but no additional points scored will be added.
6. The coaches and officials must verify the score sheet. If a coach does not verify the score sheet before leaving the field, the scorekeeper will note on that score sheet and the score will be FINAL.

## VII. Coaches

1. Coaches are expected to adhere to NFL FLAG philosophies, coaching guidelines and code of conduct.
2. Coaches are permitted to coach on the sideline and may not pass the 5 yard before each end zone.
  - a. All team coaches, team moms, fans, etc. are required and must remain a minimum of 10 yards off the field in the designated league viewing area. Only coaches and team moms are allowed on the sideline
  - b. Coaches, this is your responsibility to keep your fans and any other team associated members in the designated areas.
  - c. All coaches, team moms and volunteers must wear the supplied Mad Dogs shirts while participating in practices and games.

## IX. Live Ball/Dead Ball

1. The ball is live at the snap of the ball and remains live until the official whistles the ball dead.
  2. The official will indicate the neutral zone and line of scrimmage.
    - a. It is an automatic dead ball foul if any player on defense or offense enters the neutral zone. In regard to 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.
  3. A player who gains possession of the ball in the air is considered in bounds as long as the first foot or a body part other than the hand contacts the ground in the field of play with possession.
  4. 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 conduct penalty.
  5. Substitutions may be made on any dead ball.
  6. Any official can whistle the play dead.
  7. Play is ruled “dead” when:
    - a. The ball hits the ground.
      - i. If the ball hits the ground as a result of a bad snap, the ball is then placed where the ball hit the ground and the game clock will continue to run
    - b. The ball-carrier’s flag is pulled.
    - c. The ball-carrier steps out of bounds.
    - d. A touchdown, PAT or safety is scored.
    - e. The ball-carrier’s knee or arm hits the ground.
    - f. The ball-carrier’s flag falls out.
    - g. The receiver catches the ball while in possession of one or no flag(s).
    - h. The 5 second pass clock expires.
    - i. Ball-carrier leaves their feet diving or to hurdle a player.
    - j. Inadvertent whistle
    - k. When pass clock is under 2 minutes, clock will stop for out of bounds, spiked ball, incomplete pass or turnover
- NOTE:** There are no fumbles, ground contact does not have to be made. If the ball is fumbled forwards then it will be spotted where the ball carrier lost possession. Loss of possession is a **DEAD BALL**.
8. If inadvertent whistle occurs the offense has two options:
    - A) take the ball where the whistle blew and the down is consumed
    - B) replay the down from the original line of scrimmage.

If it occurs on the last play of the half or game, the offense will be awarded one untimed down and given those two options.
  9. A team is allowed to use a timeout to question an official's rule interpretation. If the official's ruling is correct, the team will be charged a timeout. If the rule is interpreted incorrectly, the timeout will not be charged and the proper ruling will be enforced. Officials should all agree upon any controversial call in order to give each team the full benefit of each call.
  10. Officials should all agree in order to change a call on the field that is in dispute

# X. Running

1. The ball is spotted where the ball is when the flag is pulled.
2. The quarterback cannot directly run with the ball unless a defender crosses the line of scrimmage. The quarterback is the offensive player who receives the snap.
3. 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.
  - a. ***“Center sneak” play is no longer allowed. The QB is not allowed to handoff to the center on the first handoff of the play.***
  - b. ***Any player who receives a handoff can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage.***
  - c. ***Once the ball has been handed off, in front, behind or to the side of the quarterback, the five-second passing clock is eliminated and all defensive players are eligible to rush.***
4. Definition of a “Legal Handoff” - Total loss of possession directly from 1 offensive play to another.
5. No-run Zones are located 5 yards before each end zone. Teams are not allowed to run in these zones if the subsequent line is LIVE.

Runners are not permitted to dive or hurdle any player while advancing the ball.
8. Ballcarriers may leave their feet and the play will continue for spinning, jump cuts, QB’s passing progression or if there is a clear indication that he/she has done so to avoid a collision with another player and the play will continue without stoppage. However, if while leaving the ground, contact is made unnecessary roughness penalty **may** be enforced by the official.
9. No blocking or “screening” is allowed at any time.
10. Offensive players in close proximity of the ball-carrier must stop their motion once the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage. No running with the ball-carrier.
11. 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.

# XI. Passing

All passes must be thrown with one hand from behind the line of scrimmage, thrown forward and ball out of hand prior to breaching the line of scrimmage.

- a. There is no intentional grounding

Shovel passes are allowed but must be received beyond the line of scrimmage.

The quarterback has a five-second “pass clock.” If a pass is not thrown within the five seconds, the play is dead, the down is consumed and the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage. Once the ball is handed off, the 5-second rule is no longer in effect.

- a. If the QB is standing in the end zone at the end of the 5-second clock, the defense is awarded the safety.
- b. If the quarterback throws the ball and it is tipped or deflected by a defender the quarterback may catch and advance the ball. but may not attempt to throw again.



1. All players are eligible to receive passes (including the quarterback if the ball has been handed off behind the line of scrimmage).
2. Only one player is allowed in motion at a time. All motion must be lateral to the line of scrimmage and no motion is permitted toward the line of scrimmage.
3. A player must have at least one foot or other body part in bounds, contacting the ground first with possession.
4. In the case of simultaneous possession by both an offensive and defensive player, possession is awarded to the offense.
5. Interceptions are returnable. If returned for a score during regular game play, the score will be worth six points, two points if returned during conversions and/or overtime.

# XIII. Rushing the Passer

1. All players who rush the passer must be a minimum of seven yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped. Any number of players can rush the quarterback. Players not rushing the quarterback can defend on the line of scrimmage.  
8u and under Divisions: Defenders may not rush the passer.
2. Once the ball is handed off, the seven-yard rule no longer is in effect and all defenders may go behind the line of scrimmage.
3. A special marker, or the referee, will designate a rush line seven yards from the line of scrimmage. Defensive players should verify they are in the correct position with the official on every play.
  - a. A legal rush is:
    - i. Any rush from a point 7-yards from the defensive line of scrimmage.
    - ii. A rush from anywhere on the field AFTER the ball has been handed off by the quarterback.
  - b. A penalty may be called if:
    - i. The rusher leaves the rush line before the snap and crosses the line of scrimmage before a hand off or pass – illegal rush (5-yards from the line of scrimmage ). Offense has the right to decline the penalty
    - ii. Any defensive player crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped – offsides (5-yards from line of scrimmage ).
    - iii. 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 (5-yards from the line of scrimmage). Offense has the right to decline the penalty. The rusher may reset before the snap
    - iv. If the offense draws the rusher(s) to jump the seven-yard marker prior to the snap of the ball, that rusher(s) must reset before the snap. However, any other defender that is seven yards back may also rush. Jumping the rush is not a penalty until the rusher crosses the line of scrimmage prior to the handoff or passed ball.
  - c. Special circumstances:
    - i. Teams are not required to rush the quarterback with the seven second clock in effect.
    - ii. Teams are not required to identify their rusher before the play.
4. Players rushing the quarterback may attempt to block a pass; however, contact to the QB, unless ruled incidental by the official, would result in a roughing the passer penalty.
5. The offense cannot impede the rusher in any way. The rusher has the right to a clear path to the quarterback, regardless of where they line up prior to the snap. The PATH is set pre-snap from the rusher or rushers directly to the QB. PATH does not move once the quarterback moves. If the “path or line” is occupied by a moving offensive player, then it is the offense’s responsibility to avoid the rusher. Any disruption to the rusher’s path and/or contact will result in an impeding the rusher penalty. **If the offensive player does not move after the snap, then it is the rusher’s responsibility to go around the offensive player and to avoid contact.**
6. A sack occurs if the quarterback’s flags are pulled behind the line of scrimmage. The ball will be spotted where possession of the ball is once the flag is pulled.
  - a. A Safety is awarded if the sack takes place in the offensive team’s end zone.



## XIV. Flag Pulling

1. A legal flag pull takes place when the ball-carrier is in full possession of the ball.
2. Defenders can dive to pull flags but cannot tackle, hold or run through the ball-carrier when pulling flags.
3. It is illegal to attempt to strip or pull the ball from the ball-carrier's possession at any time.
4. If a player's flag inadvertently falls off during a play while that player has possession, the player is down immediately and the play ends. The ball is placed where the flag lands.
5. If a player who has one or no flags in their belt takes possession of the ball, the play is dead at that spot on the field.
6. A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off of a player who is not in possession of the ball.
7. 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, ball, arm or shoulder or intentionally covering the flags with the football jersey.



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## XV. Formations

1. Offenses must have a minimum of one player on the line of scrimmage (the center) and up to four players on the line of scrimmage. The quarterback must be off the line of scrimmage.
  - a. Teams may shift formations prior to the snap as long as they are set for at least 1 second before the ball is snapped.
  - b. One player at a time may go in motion at least 1 yard behind the line of scrimmage.
2. Movement by a player who is set or a player who runs toward the line of scrimmage while in motion is considered a false start.
3. 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.

## XVI. Unsportsmanlike Conduct

1. If the field monitor or referee witnesses any acts of intentional tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, or any unsportsmanlike act, the game will be stopped and the player will be ejected from the game. The decision is made at the referee's discretion. No appeals will be considered. **FOUL PLAY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED!**
2. Offensive or confrontational language is **NOT** allowed. Officials have the right to determine offensive language. If offensive or confrontational language occurs, the officials will determine if a warning or immediate ejection is warranted. 2 unsportsmanlike penalties against the same player will result in an ejection
3. Players may not physically or verbally abuse any opponent, coach or official.
4. Ball-carriers **MUST** make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position.
5. Defenders must give free releases off the line of scrimmage to offensive players and are not allowed to run through the ball-carrier when pulling flags.  
**ROUGH PLAY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED**
6. Fans must also adhere to good sportsmanship as well:
  - a. Yell to cheer on your players, not to harass officials or other teams.
  - b. Keep comments clean and profanity free.
  - c. Compliment ALL players, not just one child or team.
7. Fans are required to keep fields safe and kids friendly and adhere to league requirements for seating:
  - a. Keep younger kids and equipment such as coolers, chairs and tents a minimum of 10 yards off the field in the end zone area.
  - b. Stay within the buffer or safety areas set up, fans are not allowed to set up/sit in the endzone
  - c. Dispose of ALL trash in designated trash cans.
8. Unsportsmanlike conduct penalties:
  - a. Defense + 10 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
  - b. Offense - 10 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down

# XVII. Penalties

## i. General

1. The referee will call all penalties.
2. Referees determine incidental contact that may result from normal run of play.
3. All penalties will be assessed from the line of scrimmage, except as noted. (Spot fouls)
4. Only the team captain or head coach may ask the referee questions about rule clarification and interpretations. Players may not question calls.
5. Games or halves may not end on a defensive penalty unless the offense declines it.
6. Penalties are assessed live ball then dead ball. Live ball penalties must be assessed before play is considered complete.
7. Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal yardage when the penalty yardage is more than half the distance to the goal.
8. Spot fouls in end zone: Defensive (Ball on one-yard line, first down)/Offensive (Safety)

## ii. Defensive spot fouls

Defensive pass interference	Automatic first down
Holding	+5 yards and automatic first down
Stripping	+5 yards and automatic first down

## iii. Offensive spot fouls

Screening or blocking	Spot of Foul, - 5 yards and loss of down
Charging	Spot of Foul, -5 yards and loss of down
Flag guarding	Spot of Foul, -5 yards and loss of down

## iv. Defensive penalties

Defensive unnecessary roughness	+10 yards and automatic first down
Defensive unsportsmanlike conduct	+10 yards and automatic first down
Offside / illegal substitution	+5 yards from line of scrimmage
Illegal rush (Starting rush from inside 7-yard marker)	+5 yards from line of scrimmage
Illegal flag pull (Before the receiver has the ball)	+5 yards from line of scrimmage
Roughing the passer	+5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Taunting	+5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down

## v. Offensive penalties

Offensive unnecessary roughness	-10 yards and loss of down
Offensive unsportsmanlike conduct	-10 yards and loss of down
Offside / false start / illegal substitution	-5 yards from line of scrimmage
Illegal forward pass (Any pass received or lands behind the line of scrimmage or throwing a pass after crossing the line of scrimmage)	-5 yards from line of scrimmage
Offensive pass interference	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Illegal motion (More than one person moving)	-5 yards from line of scrimmage
Delay of game	-5 yards from line of scrimmage
Impeding the rusher	-5 yards from line of scrimmage
Illegal Procedure	-5 yards from line of scrimmage

# XVIII. 8U, 7U & 6U & Grade Based Guidelines

These are NFL FLAG recommended and adopted adjustments to the rules that have been proven successful among RCX Grade Based NFL FLAG Leagues and NFL Leagues throughout the country from their direct input to assist with teaching the Game in the younger age groups.

## a. 8U / 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade

- i. Defenders may **NOT** rush the passer unless there is a legal handoff executed in the backfield.
- ii. One Coach for each team is permitted on the field pre-snap to help their players, but **MUST** remain a minim of 10 yards behind the closest player.

## b. 7U & 6U / 1<sup>st</sup> Grade and Below

- i. 'No Run' zones are eliminated. Teams may run the ball anywhere on the field.
- ii. Defenders may **NOT** rush the passer unless there is a legal handoff executed in the backfield.
- iii. One Coach for each team is permitted on the field pre and post snap to help their players, but post snap at a safe distance to plays completion.
- iv. If the ball falls to, or touches the ground during the initial center to quarterback exchange, the play is ruled a 'Do Over' with no loss of down, once per down. On a second consecutive occurrence, the down is consumed.
- v. Defenders **MUST** line up at least five yards from the line of scrimmage prior to the snap.

