

2025 OFFICIAL PLAYING RULES



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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 the team that started the game on defense in the second half.
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.
 - If the offensive team fails to cross midfield after 4th down and elect to "punt" on 4th down, possession of the ball changes and the opposing team will start a new possession from its own 5-yard line (**6U & 8U Divisions ONLY**). If the offensive team goes for it on 4th down and does not cross midfield, the opposing team will start a new possession from the spot where 4th down ended. **10U and up may elect to punt the ball on 4th down.**
 - Any time there is a 'PUNT or PLAY decision on 4th down, the referee WILL ask the offense's Head Coach to declare 'Punt or Play'. The coach MUST make an immediate decision or risk a delay of game penalty.
 - Teams may use a timeout to change the declaration of "Play" at any time prior to the expiration of the play clock.



II. Terminology

Boundary Lines	The outer lines marking the playing field's perimeter, including sidelines and end zones.
Line of Scrimmage	Line of Scrimmage (LOS) an imaginary line running through the point of the football and across the width of the field.
Line-to-Gain	The yard line the offense must reach for a first down.
Rush Line	An imaginary line 7 yards from the LOS on the defense's side.
Offense	The team with possession of the ball.
Defense	The team trying to stop the offense and regain possession.
Passer	Any offensive player who throws the ball, not just the quarterback.
Rusher	The defensive player who starts from the rush line and tries to pressure the quarterback by either pulling flags or blocking passes.
Live Ball	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.
Dead Ball	The time between plays when no action is occurring.
Whistle	Official's signal to stop play for timeouts, end of plays, or game periods.
Inadvertent Whistle	An official's whistle that is sounded in error.
Charging	When a ball-carrier illegally runs directly into a set defensive player. This includes leading with the head or making contact with shoulder, forearm, or chest.
Flag Guarding	An illegal act when the ball-carrier tries to block defenders from pulling their flags - whether by stiff-arming, dropping their elbow/head, or using the ball itself as a shield.
Shovel Pass	A legal forward pass across the LOS (Underhand, backhand or by pushing the ball forward).
Lateral	A backward or parallel toss of the ball by the ball-carrier.
Unsportsmanlike Conduct	Confrontational or offensive behavior or language.



III. Equipment

1. All players must wear official NFL FLAG belts and flags provided by the league (**Shruumz flags are allowed**). All players **MUST** wear mouth guards at all times while on the field. Game balls should be age specific (**10U division may use Pee Wee-sized footballs**).
2. 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.
3. Players may tape their forearms, hands and fingers. Players may wear gloves, elbow pads and knee pads. Braces with exposed metals are not allowed.
4. Players must remove all jewelry and hats. Headbands or winter beanies are allowed.
5. Players may wear soft shell helmets, halos and sunglasses but they must be secured at all times while on the field. Prescription glasses are permitted without a strap.
6. Players' jerseys must be tucked into shorts or pants, if they hang below the belt line.
7. Players must 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 their pockets. If shorts or pants are taped, the tape will be treated as a flag if pulled.
8. Participants must bring their own official NFL FLAG or SHRUUMZ belts and mouth guards to the field.
9. NFL FLAG footballs will be provided with uniform order.
10. **Flag belts and flags cannot be the same color as the player's shorts or pants.**



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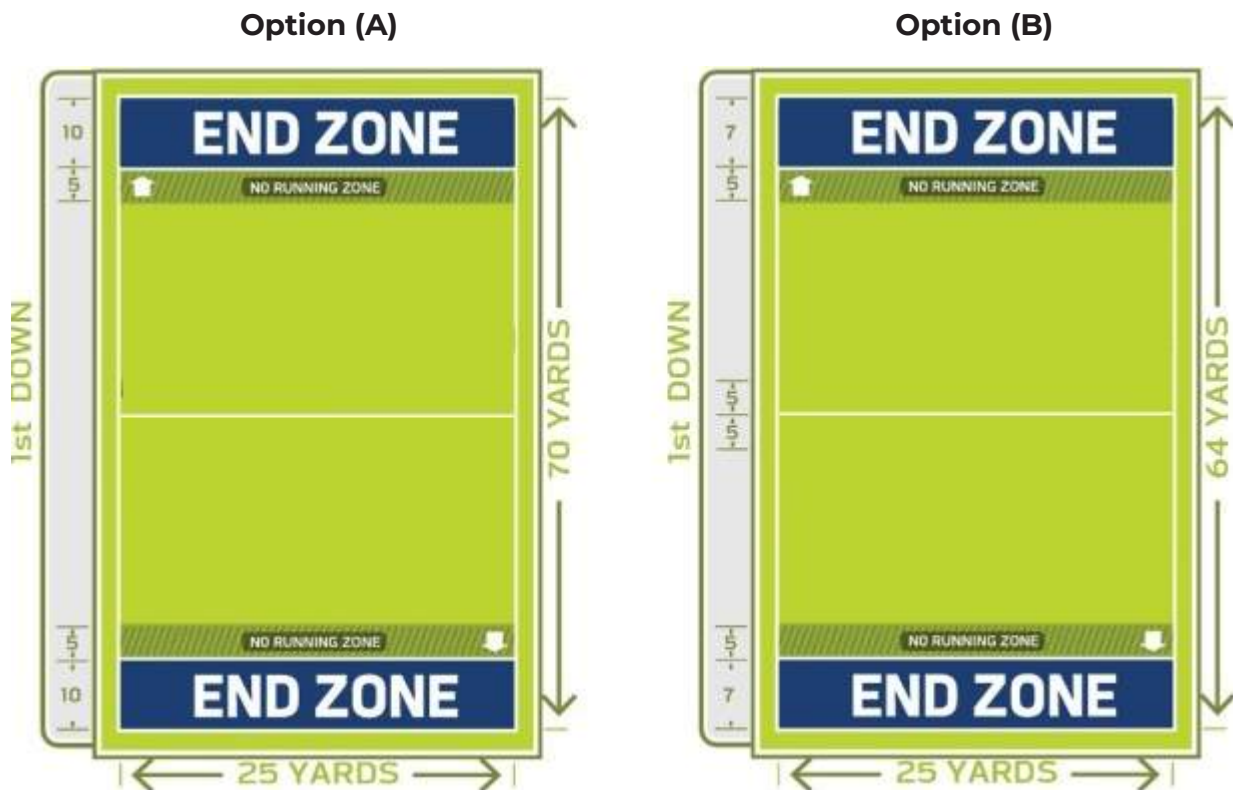
IV. Field/Special Teams

Two standard field size options:

Option A: 25 yards wide × 70 yards long with 10-yard end zones

Option B: 25 yards wide × 64 yards long with 7-yard end zones

1. Both field layouts will have a midfield line to gain for a first down. 'No Run Zones' are located 5 yards prior to midfield and 5 yards prior to the opponent's end zone.
2. Stepping on the boundary line is considered out of bounds.
3. 'No Run' Zones are in place to prevent teams from conducting power run plays. While in the 'No Run' Zones, teams cannot run the ball across the LOS. All plays must result in a forward pass across the LOS.
4. The referee will spot the ball in the middle of the field prior to the 'Ready to Play' whistle. The ball may NOT be closer than 10-yards to any sideline.



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Special Teams

Kickoff

1. Kickoffs must be made from the team's own 10-yard line. In the 10u division, ball will be kicked from the 15-yard line.
2. On a kickoff, if the ball contacts a player's body and then touches the ground, the ball is considered down at the spot where it hits the ground.
3. No player from the kicking team may be in front of the kicker at the time the ball is kicked on any kick-off, Offside will be called if a player from the kicking team is in advance of the ball at the time that it is kicked. A 5-yard penalty to be assessed after the kickoff.
4. No player from the receiving team may be in front of mid-field at the time the ball is kicked on any kick-off. Offside will be called if a receiving player is in advance of mid-field at the time that it is kicked. A 5-yard penalty to be assessed after the kickoff.
5. If the ball goes out of bounds on a kickoff the receiving team will receive the ball 5 yards from mid-field .
6. The ball is not live until the receiving team has touched it. If the ball is touched and hits the ground, the ball will be ruled dead and placed at the spot it was touched.
7. During Punts/Kick Returns, If the ball is caught in the end zone, the receiving team may advance the ball out of the End-Zone for a return. If the ball is dropped or rolls into the end zone during punt/kick return the ball cannot be advanced and will be declared a touchback.

Punts: (See rule #17 below for 6u and 8u)

1. If team elects to punt, players on the punting team may not move until the ball is kicked. On the receiving team, a minimum of three (3) players must line up on the line, with a maximum of three (3) players deep to receive the punt.
2. Once the ball is received, all players in front on the ball carrier must stop in place to avoid a blocking call.

Onside Play:

1. **'4th and 20' on an onside kick, if there is a penalty it supersedes the play.**
2. In lieu of a kick-Off, the kicking Team has the option to elect an optional play, called an Onside Play. An Onside Play is directly equivalent to a 4th down play with Midfield as the line to gain for the Offensive Team and would start at the Throwing Team's 5-yard Line. There is no onside play allowed unless behind by 12 or less points and in the 2nd half in the last 2-minutes of the game. This can be repeated until the game is tied, or the lead is taken.

V. Timing and Overtime

1. Regular Season Games are played on a 40-minute continuous clock with 2 - 20-minute halves, unless one team gains a **35-point advantage (MERCY RULE)**, which will end the game. Teams can agree to continue without changing the score. The clock stops for halftime, injuries and at the Officials' discretion.
2. **Halftime is 2 minutes.**
3. Offense has 30 seconds to snap the ball.
4. Each team has **(2) 60-second timeout per half.** They do not carry over.
5. Officials will stop the clock for team timeouts, player injuries and at their discretion.
6. If the score is tied at the end of regulation play, an overtime period will be used to determine the winner. **Overtime format is as follows:**
 - a. Home team calls the coin 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 the choice to be on offense or defense to start every round of overtime.
 - ii. The referee will determine which end of the field the entire overtime will be played.
 - b. 1st OVERTIME: Each team will get one (1) play from the defense's 5-yard line for one point or the defense's 10-yard line for two points. Each team has the choice to go for 1 or 2 points in the first OVERTIME PERIOD ONLY.
 - 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 game is over.
 - c. Starting with the 2nd overtime, both teams must attempt a 2-point conversion from the 10-yard line. This process will repeat in each subsequent overtime until a winner is determined.
 - d. The Final Score will be recorded to include all points scored in the overtime periods.
 - e. All regulation period rules and penalties are in effect.
 - f. There are no timeouts in overtime.
 - g. Interceptions are returnable for a score in OT and are worth 2 points.
 - h. Interceptions returned for a score in the first or second 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 1-point extra point is pass only; 2-point extra point can be a run or pass.
 - Interceptions returned for scores during regular game play are worth 6 points. 1 and 2pt. extra point conversions or overtime interceptions returned are worth 2 points.
3. **Safety:** 2 points
 - 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 a team is winning by **35 points or more (MERCY RULE)**, the game is over. Teams may elect to continue but no additional points scored will be added.
6. Forfeits will be scored 35-0 for the winning team.
7. The coaches, officials and scorekeeper 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 line before each end zone.
 - Only coaches and team moms are permitted on the sideline; all others must remain at least 10 yards off the field in the designated viewing area. Coaches are responsible for enforcing this rule.
 - All team coaches, team moms, and volunteers must wear the supplied Mad Dogs shirts when participating in practices and games.



VIII. 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 LOS.
 - It is an automatic dead ball foul if any player on defense or offense enters the neutral zone. The game officials may give teams a “courtesy” neutral zone notification to allow their players to move back behind the LOS.
3. A player who gains possession in the air is in bounds if their first foot or another body part (excluding the hand) contacts the field while maintaining possession.
4. Substitutions may be made during any dead ball period.
5. The defense may not simulate 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.
6. Any official can whistle the play dead.
7. Play is ruled “dead” when:
 - The ball hits the ground.
 - If the ball hits the ground as a result of a snap, backwards pitch or lateral, the ball will be placed where the ball hit the ground.
 - The ball-carrier’s flag is pulled.
 - The ball-carrier steps out of bounds.
 - A touchdown, PAT or safety is scored.
 - The ball-carrier’s knee, shin, leg, forearm or arm hits the ground.
 - The ball-carrier’s flag falls out.
 - The receiver catches the ball while in possession of 1 or 0 flag(s).
 - The 5 second pass clock expires.
 - Inadvertent whistle
 - Ball-carrier leaves their feet to dive, jump or hurdle a player.
 - When the play clock is under 2 minutes, clock will stop for out of bounds, spiked ball, incomplete pass, or turnover.

NOTE: A fumble occurs when a player loses possession, and the ball contacts the ground. The play is dead at the spot of ground contact.

8. If an inadvertent whistle occurs, the team in possession has two options:
 - Take the ball where the whistle blew and the down will count.
 - Replay the down from the original LOS.

If an inadvertent whistle occurs on the final play of a half or game, the offense is awarded one untimed down with two options.

9. Teams may use a timeout to challenge a rule interpretation. If the official’s ruling is correct, the timeout is charged; if incorrect, the timeout is restored and the ruling corrected.



IX. 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 LOS. The quarterback is the offensive player who receives the snap under center directly or in shotgun formation.
3. Direct handoffs, pitches, and laterals are permitted behind the LOS only.
 - **“Center sneak” play is NOT allowed. The QB may NOT handoff, pitch or lateral the ball first to the center.**
 - **Any player who receives a handoff, backward pass, pitch or lateral can throw the ball from behind the LOS.**
 - **Once the ball has been handed off, in front, behind or to the side of the quarterback, or a backward pass, pitch or lateral has occurred, the 5-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. Teams are not allowed to run in the ‘NO RUN ZONES’, which are 5 yards before each end zone.
6. Runners are not permitted to jump, leap or hurdle, in the officials' judgement, while advancing the ball. The play is to be blown dead, and the ball spotted where the jump, leap or hurdle occurred.
7. Ball carriers may leave their feet, and the play will continue for spinning, jump cuts, QB's passing or if there is a clear indication that he/she has done so to avoid a collision with another player. The play will continue without stoppage. However, if while leaving the ground, illegal contact is made, a penalty may be enforced by the official.
8. No blocking or “screening” is allowed at any time.
9. Offensive players in close proximity of the ball carrier must stop their motion once the ball has crossed the LOS. No running with the ball carrier.
10. 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.



X. Passing

1. Only 1 forward pass, thrown from behind the LOS, is permitted each offensive play. The ball must be released prior to crossing the LOS. There can be unlimited backward passes behind the LOS.
 - There is no intentional grounding. The quarterback may throw the ball anywhere across the LOS to avoid a sack.
2. Shovel passes are allowed and must be a forward pass, from behind the LOS, and received beyond the LOS.
3. The quarterback has a 5 second “pass clock.” If a pass is not thrown within 5 seconds, the play is dead, the down counts and the ball is returned to the LOS. Once the ball is handed off, pitched or lateraled behind the LOS, the 5 second rule is no longer in effect.
 - If the QB is standing in the end zone at the end of the 5 second clock, the ball is returned to the LOS (LOS), and it will be the next down.
 - If the quarterback throws the ball and then catches it, the play is dead and treated like an incomplete pass.

XI. Receiving



1. All players are eligible to receive passes (including the quarterback if the ball has been handed off, pitched or lateraled behind the LOS).
2. **A player must have at least one foot or other body part in bounds**, contacting the ground first with possession.
3. In the case of simultaneous possession by both an offensive and defensive player, possession is awarded to the offense.
4. Only 1 player is allowed in motion at a time and must be lateral to the LOS.
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.

XII. Rushing the Passer

1. **All players who rush the passer must be a minimum of 7 yards from the LOS** when the ball is snapped. **Any number of players can rush the quarterback.** Players not rushing the quarterback can defend the LOS.

8U and under Divisions: Defenders may not rush the passer. See Rule #17 below.

2. Once the ball is handed off, pitched or lateraled backwards behind the LOS, all defenders may cross the LOS to defend and pull the flag. The 7-yard rule is no longer in effect.
3. A special marker, or the game official, will designate a rush line 7 yards from the LOS. Defensive players should verify they are in the correct position with the official on every play.
 - a. A legal rush is:
 - I. Any rush by the designated rushers, 7 yards from the LOS.
 - II. A rush from anywhere on the field AFTER the ball has been handed off, pitched or thrown backwards by the player receiving the snap.
 - b. A penalty may be called if:
 - I. The rusher leaves the rush line before the snap and crosses the LOS before a handoff, pitch, lateral or pass – Illegal rush (5-yards from the LOS and first down). Offense has the right to decline the penalty.
 - II. Any defensive player crosses the LOS before the ball is snapped – Encroachment (5-yards from LOS and first down). Offense has the right to decline the penalty.
 - III. Any defensive player not lined up at the rush line crosses the LOS before the ball is passed, pitched, lateraled or handed off – Illegal rush (5-yards from the LOS and first down). Offense has the right to decline the penalty.
 - IV. If the offense draws the identified rusher(s) across the 7-yard marker prior to the snap of the ball, the rusher(s) CANNOT legally rush. Jumping the rush is not a penalty until the rusher crosses the LOS prior to a handoff, pitch, lateral or forward pass.
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 rusher's path to the quarterback is set pre-snap and must remain clear. Offensive players must avoid moving into the path; any obstruction or contact results in an 'Impeding the Rusher' penalty. **If the offensive player is stationary after the snap, the offensive player must be avoided by the rusher.**
6. A sack occurs if the quarterback's flags are pulled behind the LOS. The ball will be spotted where possession of the ball is when the flag is pulled.
 - a. A 2-point Safety is awarded if a sack takes place in the offensive team's end zone.



XIII. 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 on 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 flag(s) off 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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XIV. Formations

1. Offenses must have a minimum of one player on the LOS (the center) and up to four players on the LOS. The quarterback must be off the LOS.
2. Movement simulating the snap, by a player who is set, 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.

****Only one player is allowed in motion when the ball is snapped. The player MUST be in motion, off the LOS. All motion must be parallel or backwards to the LOS when the ball is snapped.**

****Players may shift positions on offense at any time, all players must still reset for 1 second, prior to the snap.**

XV. Unsportsmanlike Conduct

1. If a field monitor or official witnesses intentional tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, blocking, or any unsportsmanlike conduct, the game will be stopped and the player ejected at the official's discretion. No appeals are allowed. **Intentional physical play is strictly prohibited!**
2. Offensive or confrontational language is **NOT** allowed. Officials have the authority to determine what is offensive and may assess an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty, with ejection at their discretion.
3. Players or Coaches may not physically or verbally abuse any opponent, coach or game official.
4. Ball-carriers **MUST** make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position.
5. Defenders must give free releases off the LOS to offensive players and are not allowed to run through the ball carrier when pulling flags. Offensive players may **NOT** initiate contact at the LOS with defenders.
6. Fans must also adhere to good sportsmanship as well:
 - Fans should cheer on their players only, not harass officials or opposing team.
 - **Comments must be clean and profanity free.**
 - 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:
 - Keep younger kids and equipment such as coolers, chairs and tents a minimum of 10 yards off the field in the end zone area.
 - Stay within the buffer or safety areas set up. Fans are not allowed to set up in the end zone.
 - Dispose of ALL trash in designated trash cans.
8. Unsportsmanlike conduct penalties:
 - Defensive penalty +10 yards from the dead ball spot and an automatic first down
 - Offensive penalty -10 yards from the dead ball spot and a loss of down
 - Two (2) unsportsmanlike penalties on any player or coach in a game result in a disqualification and may lead to additional discipline.



XVI. Penalties

I. General

1. Referees will call all penalties and determine incidental contact during normal play.
2. All penalties are assessed from the line of scrimmage unless otherwise noted (e.g., spot fouls).
3. Only the team captain or head coach may ask for rule clarifications; players may not question calls.
4. Games or halves cannot end on a defensive penalty unless declined by the offense.
5. Penalties are enforced in order: live ball first, then dead ball. Live ball penalties must be assessed before the play is complete.
6. When penalty yardage exceeds half the distance to the goal, it will be assessed as half the distance to the goal.
7. 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/Illegal Contact	+5 yards and automatic first down
Stripping	+5 yards and automatic first down

III. Offensive spot fouls

Screening or blocking	-5 yards and loss of down
Charging	-5 yards and loss of down
Flag guarding	-5 yards and loss of down
Holding/Illegal Contact	-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 LOS and automatic first down
Illegal rush <small>(Starting rush from inside 7-yard marker)</small>	+5 yards from LOS and automatic first down
Illegal flag pull <small>(Before the receiver has the ball)</small>	+5 yards from LOS and automatic first down
Roughing the passer	+5 yards from LOS and automatic first down
Taunting	+10 yards from LOS 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 LOS and loss of down
Illegal forward pass	-5 yards from LOS and loss of down
Offensive pass interference	-5 yards from LOS and loss of down
Illegal motion	-5 yards from LOS and loss of down
Delay of game	-5 yards from LOS and loss of down
Impeding the rusher	-5 yards from LOS and loss of down
Illegal Procedure	-5 yards from LOS and loss of down
Taunting	-10 yards from LOS and loss of down



XVII. 6U & 8U

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.

1. 6U & 8U

- **6U has 7 seconds to throw the ball.**
- Defenders may **NOT** rush the passer unless there is a legal handoff executed in the backfield.
- One Coach for each team is permitted on the field pre-snap to help their players but **MUST** be off the field prior to the snap of the ball.
- There will be no special teams. If the team elects to punt or after a scoring drive the ball will be placed on the opponents 5-yard line. In the 8U Division, if the team chooses not to punt and go for it on 4th down, but does not convert, the ball will be turned over at the current spot.

