



Indoor Flag Football Rules 2026

Boys and Girls

1. Game Procedures

- 1.1. A minimum of five (5) players is required to start the game.
- 1.2. There are no first downs.
- 1.3. All team personnel must remain in the designated bench area.
- 1.4. Only players and coaches are allowed on the team benches.
- 1.5. Coaches may be on the field during the huddle but must retreat before the play begins.
- 1.6. Rosters are final after the last regular season game (maximum 15 players).
- 1.7. Players must participate in at least three (3) regular season games to be eligible for playoff games.
- 1.8. A 10-minute grace period is allowed if a team has fewer than 5 players at the scheduled start time.
 - 1.8.1. If 5 players arrive during the grace period, the team is penalized 6 points.
 - 1.8.2. If not, the game is forfeited, and the score is recorded as 6–0.
- 1.9. Players may only substitute between plays, not during active play.
- 1.10. Teams may formally protest game outcomes or referee decisions within 24 hours of the game's conclusion. Protests must be submitted in writing to the league director.
- 1.11. Officials may call a “sportsmanship timeout” if player emotions escalate or tensions rise. No play is running during this timeout; it is solely for calming and re-setting the tone of the game.

1.12. If a player is found wearing banned or unsafe equipment mid-play, they will be immediately substituted out until compliant, and the previous play will stand.

2. Clock Rules

2.1. The game consists of two (20) minute halves.

2.2. The clock will stop during the last (!) minute of each half for the following events:

- Incomplete passes
- Player goes out of bounds
- Scoring plays
- Change of possession
- Timeouts
- Penalties, if the Mercy Rule is not in effect

2.3. Mercy Rule: If one team leads by 21 points or more, the clock will not stop in the final minute, even during standard stoppage events.

2.4. The play clock is **30** seconds and is enforced throughout the entire game.

2.5. Each team is allowed two (**2**) timeouts per half.

- Timeouts are **60** seconds and do not carry over from the first to the second half.

- Timeouts stop the game clock, and the play clock resumes immediately after.

- Back-to-back timeouts are allowed.

2.6. Halftime duration is four (4) minutes.

2.7. The game officially ends when:

- The clock expires at the end of the second 20-minute half.
- A final play is allowed to finish if it began before the clock reached zero.

- The referee's whistle, not the horn, signals the end of each half or the game.

- There is no overtime or sudden death in regular season games.
- Tie-break rules apply only during playoffs (see Rule 3).

3. Tie Games (Playoffs Only)

3.1. Each team starts at the 3-yard line and has four (4) downs to score.

3.2. If both teams fail to score, the game goes into sudden death.

3.3. Interceptions can be returned for touchdowns.

- 3.4. No game clock; play clock remains enforced.
- 3.5. QB has 5 seconds to hand off or throw the football.
- 3.6. The ball is dead if it hits the ground ("No Fumbles").
- 3.7. Two full steps are required for a catch to count.
- 3.8. Players are downed by one-hand touch if a flag is missing.
- 3.9. Flags must be worn correctly on both **hips**.
- 3.10. No diving or becoming airborne while in possession of the football.
- 3.11. Inadvertent whistle = play is dead (spot at forward foot or replay).
- 3.12. Ball is spotted where the flag is pulled, not where the ball is.
- 3.13. Touchdowns require both flags and the ball to cross the plane.
- 3.14. Jerseys must be fully tucked in; otherwise, the player may be ruled down.
- 3.15. Only the designated captain may approach referees calmly.

4. Offensive Rules

- 4.1. Standard format: 5 v 5 – Quarterback, center, and three receivers.
- 4.2. A minimum of three (3) players must be on the line of scrimmage.
- 4.3. All offensive players are eligible receivers.
- 4.4. The quarterback may hand off the ball to a teammate or toss the football backwards. That player may then run or attempt a forward pass.
 - The quarterback or an active runner may not pitch or lateral the ball parallel to the line of scrimmage.
- 4.5. Once the football is caught or carried past the line of scrimmage, no offensive player may block; all downfield players must place their hands at their sides.
- 4.6. Offensive players must not impede the progress of defensive rushers at any point.
- 4.7. Legal Catch Definition:
 - 4.7.1. A legal catch is completed when the player secures possession of the football and gets at least one foot in bounds.
 - 4.7.2. The receiver must have full control of the football and demonstrate intent to continue the play within the field of play.
- 4.8. The quarterback may self-hike the ball to start the play.
- 4.9. If the quarterback drops the ball before handing it off to a runner, it is considered a dead play and results in a loss of down.
- 4.10. The quarterback must release the ball within a 5-Mississippi count or the play is dead and results in a loss of down.
- 4.11. Offensive Set Rule:

- The offense must be set after the official spots the ball and may begin the next play at any time thereafter.
- The offense does not have to wait for the defense to be set before snapping the ball.

5. Punting Rules

5.1. All punts are declared.

5.2. Ball is placed 2 yards from the end zone on the opposite side after a punt.

6. Extra Point Rules

6.1. After a touchdown, teams may choose to attempt a 1-point or 2-point conversion. (Updated 4/29)

6.1.1. For a 1-point conversion, the ball is placed at the 3-yard line.

6.1.2. For a 2-point conversion, the ball is placed at the 5-yard line.

6.2. 1-Point Conversion Rules:

- A completed forward pass into the end zone is required to score.
- No running plays are allowed.

6.3. 2-Point Conversion Rules:

6.3.1. Run plays are allowed.

6.3.2. The quarterback may hand off.

6.3.3. Forward passes are allowed.

6.4. Defensive Interceptions:

- On either conversion attempt, if the defense intercepts the ball, they may return it for 2 points.

6.5. Quarterback Play Clock (Mississippi Count):

- The quarterback has a 5-Mississippi count to hand off or release the football.

- The official will count out loud: "1 Mississippi, 2 Mississippi..." up to 5.

- If the ball is not released by the end of the 5-Mississippi count, the play is dead and results in a loss of down with no points awarded.

7. Defensive Rules

7.1. A defensive player must defend the line of scrimmage at the start of each play.

7.2. The line of scrimmage defender may only engage after the ball is handed off, pitched backward, or a forward pass is attempted.

- The defender is **not allowed to drop into coverage** at the snap of the ball.
- The defender is **not allowed to initiate contact or bump an offensive player at the snap.**

7.3. Defensive players are not allowed to rush the quarterback.

7.4. Defenders within five (5) yards may rush once the ball is handed off, pitched backward, or thrown forward.

7.5. No slapping at the football while the runner is in motion.

- **Penalty:** Unsportsmanlike conduct – 7 yards & automatic 1st down.

7.6. No contact to break up passes.

- **Penalty:** Illegal contact – 3 yards & automatic 1st down.

7.7. No jamming, contact, or tackling at any point.

7.8. Do not touch the quarterback above the waist.

- Go for the flag only.
- **Penalty:** Roughing the passer – 7 yards & automatic 1st down.

7.9. No defensive holding.

- **Penalty:** 3 yards from end of the run or line of scrimmage & repeat down.

7.10. No pushing ball carriers out of bounds.

- **Penalty:** Roughing – 7 yards & automatic 1st down.

7.11. No pushing or engaging players into the wall or bleachers.

- **Penalty:** Unsportsmanlike conduct & ejection (minimum 1 game suspension).

7.12. Flag Display Requirement:

- When a defensive player successfully pulls a flag, they must raise the flag immediately to signal that the play is stopped.

- This ensures clarity for the officials and opposing players that the runner is considered “down.”

8. Guarding the Flag Belt

8.1. Runners shall not flag guard using their hands, arms, or the ball to deny an opponent the opportunity to pull the flag.

- **Penalty:** 3 yards and loss of down.

8.2. Examples of flag guarding include:

8.2.1. Swinging the hand or arm over the flag to block access.

8.2.2. Placing the ball over the flag.

8.2.3. Lowering the shoulders to shield the flag.

8.2.4. Holding or adjusting the flag or belt with the hand.

8.2.5. Stiff arming or running directly into a defender.

- **Penalty:** 7 yards and loss of down.

8.2.6. Wearing flags improperly or reversed (inverted flags) is considered an unsportsmanlike foul.

- **Penalty:** 7 yards from the previous spot and loss of down.

8.3. Flag Belt Requirement:

- All players must have their flag belts properly fastened and tucked in at all times, including during extra point attempts.

- Flags must be worn on each hip, fully visible and easily accessible to defenders.

- Failure to comply may result in the player being ruled down or penalized for flag guarding.

9. Conduct & Behavior

9.1. Zero tolerance for verbal or physical abuse toward referees — league suspension or removal may occur.

9.2. Fighting will not be tolerated. Anyone involved in a physical altercation will be ejected from the game. The league director will determine the length of suspension or removal.

9.3. Racial, derogatory, or religious comments will not be tolerated. Any coach, Student, or manager making such remarks will be ejected and suspended for a minimum of three (3) games.

9.4. The league reserves the right to suspend any player or team for unsportsmanlike conduct.

9.5. Taunting is strictly prohibited. Excessive celebration, verbal taunts, or gestures meant to demean or provoke opponents will result in an

unsportsmanlike conduct penalty and possible ejection for repeat offenses. (Updated 4/29)

10. Penalties Summary

7-yard penalties:

- 10.1. Rushing the passer
- 10.2. Unsportsmanlike conduct
- 10.3. Hurdling
- 10.4. Bulling
- 10.5. Diving
- 10.6. Pushing into wall/bleachers (ejection)
- 10.7. Straight arm
- 10.8. Tackling
- 10.9. Inverted flags

5-yard penalties:

- 10.10. Illegal block
- 10.11. Illegal contact
- 10.12. Offensive pass interference (repeat down)

3-yard penalties:

- 10.13. Motion
- 10.14. Offsides (offensive or defensive)
- 10.15. Encroachment
- 10.16. Defensive holding
- 10.17. Flag guarding
- 10.18. Spiking the football
- 10.19. Illegal motion
- 10.20. Intentional grounding (from spot, loss of down)
- 10.21. Too many players on the field

Automatic first downs:

- 10.22. Defensive pass interference (1-yard line if in end zone)
- 10.23. Roughing QB
- 10.24. Certain defensive contact fouls

11. Equipment & Uniform Rules

11.1. The league provides game football (junior NCAA size).

11.2. Sneakers are mandatory; no cleats, hats, jewelry, or watches.

11.3. Teams must have matching shirts with numbers.

11.4. Jerseys must be fully tucked to avoid flag guarding penalties.

11.5. All students must be in uniform in order to play. **No Uniform, No Play.**

11.6. Flag belts must be worn properly and remain tucked in at all times. Players with untucked or improperly worn belts may be ruled down or penalized for flag guarding. (Updated 4/29/25)

12. Safety & Equipment Enforcement

12.1. Jewelry Policy:

12.1.1. Players may not wear any form of jewelry during games, including watches, bracelets, necklaces, rings, or earrings.

12.1.2. Taping over jewelry is not permitted. All items must be fully removed before participation.

12.1.3. Violation will result in an immediate stoppage of play, and the player must substitute until compliant.

12.2. Hair Accessories & Grooming:

12.2.1. Metal or hard plastic hairpins, clips, or barrettes are strictly prohibited.

12.2.2. Only soft, fabric-based hair ties or elastic bands may be used.

12.2.3. Hair must be placed in a protective hairstyle (such as braids, buns, or ponytails) to prevent interference with flags or other players.

12.2.4. Hair may not cover the flags at any time, as it poses a safety risk and obstructs defenders' ability to safely pull the flag.

12.2.5. Unsafe hair accessories or loose hair creating a hazard must be corrected before the player may continue.

12.3. Mouthguard Requirement:

12.3.1. All players must wear a properly fitted mouthguard at all times while on the field.

12.3.2. A player without a mouthguard is not allowed to participate in a play.

12.3.3. Mouth guards must be worn inside the mouth (not hanging) from the mouth or shirt).

12.3.4. Players found without a mouthguard during a play will be immediately removed until compliant.

13. Playoff Rules

13.1. All teams will qualify for the playoffs, regardless of regular season record.

13.2. A complete team roster must be submitted prior to each playoff game.

13.2.1. The roster must include no more than fifteen (15) players.

13.2.2. Only players listed on the official game roster are eligible to participate.

13.3. Players must still meet the regular season eligibility requirement of having played in at least three (3) regular season games.

13.4. Failure to submit a valid roster prior to the game may result in disqualification or forfeiture at the discretion of league officials.

13.5. Standings & Tiebreakers

- Points For (PF) and Points Against (PA) will be recorded and totaled throughout the season.

- In the event of identical records, playoff seeding will be determined in the following order:
 1. Head-to-head record
 2. Points For (PF)
 3. Points Against (PA)
 4. Coin toss (if still tied)