

# NATIONAL FLAG FOOTBALL RULES

Version 5.0 - LEAGUE RULES



THE 2021 OFFICIAL  
RULE BOOK OF  
NATIONAL FLAG FOOTBALL  
VERSION 5.0



# NATIONAL FLAG FOOTBALL RULES

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### PLAYING TIME

- All children should receive equal playing time for both offense and defense in each game they participate in.
- Coaches are asked to monitor each other and report any infractions that they see.
- If a coach is caught not evenly rotating his/her players, disciplinary action will be taken.

### DIVISIONS

- Players are placed on teams using a variety of methods including but not limited to school, grade, and buddy requests.
- Teams are placed into divisions based on grade level.
- Divisions may be separate or combined depending on the number of children registered.
- Divisions are as follows:
  - Lombardi Division (Usually 1st grade and younger)
  - Shula Division (Usually 2nd and/or 3rd grade)
  - Madden Division (Usually 4th grade and older)

### FORMAT

- The game is played with five (5) players. However, a minimum of four (4) players must be on the field at all times.
- A player may only appear on one roster per division.
- If a player is found playing on a team illegally, the coach and illegal player may be removed from the league.

### PLAYER ATTIRE

- Players are designated as home or away based on the schedule. The away team will wear the white side of the jersey and the home team will wear the colored side.
- Players are required to wear protective mouthpieces at all times during both games and practices.
- Players must wear the official NFL jersey provided by the league for games. If a player arrives at the game without his/her jersey, he/she may not be permitted to play.
- Jerseys must be tucked in at all times. If a jersey is hanging out, flag guarding may be called.
- All players must start with their mouth pieces in, jerseys tucked in, flag belts on, and flags properly secured at the hips of each player with the flags pointing outward.
- Molded and screw-in cleats are permitted. No metal cleats are allowed.
- No jewelry, or hand warmers are permitted during the games. Hats with a brim, may be worn backwards only.
- Towels are not permitted on the waist of players.
- Shorts and pants cannot have open pockets. All open pockets must be taped.

### EQUIPMENT - FLAGS & BALLS

- The league will provide each team with its NFL jerseys, flags, and football. These footballs are the mandatory game balls used for all divisions. No other footballs are permitted during game play.
- Flags must be NFL FLAG sanctioned. Only yellow, green, red or blue flags are allowed.
- Team shorts and flags cannot be the same color, i.e. if your flags are blue, you cannot wear blue shorts or pants.
- Intentionally tampering with equipment will result in ejection from the playing field with potential suspension for the remainder of the event, season, or program
- **BALL TYPE:**
  - Lombardi Division: FRANKLIN – PLAYBOOK (9 INCH)
  - Shula Division: NFL FLAG OR NFF 5028 (BLUE BALL)
  - Madden Division: NFL FLAG (BROWN BALL) OR NFF 5019 (WHITE BALL)

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### COACHES

- **Teams may ONLY have 3 coaches.** These coaches must be identified on the team roster to be an official coach.
- Coaches are **REQUIRED** to wear the coach's shirt provided for the **current season** of play. Without this shirt, coaches are not permitted on the field.
- All coaches, both offensive and defensive, must move to the **sidelines** prior to the snap of the ball.  
**Exception: Lombardi division coaches** can remain on the field during a play on **offense only**.
- Coaches are responsible for having a rulebook and schedule.

### OFFICIAL "NO SHOW" POLICY

**Every now and then, we may run into a challenge when an official does not show up for a scheduled game.**

**In the instance that this may occur, our plan is as follows:**

- A coach from each team will be asked to co-officiate the game. One coach will keep track of time (24- minute halves) while the other coach will keep track of score.
- Coaches will need to be cognizant of downs, 7 second passing clock, and rush marker (7 yards – Madden Division Only).
- On the ref card, please print your name legibly.

### POSSESSIONS

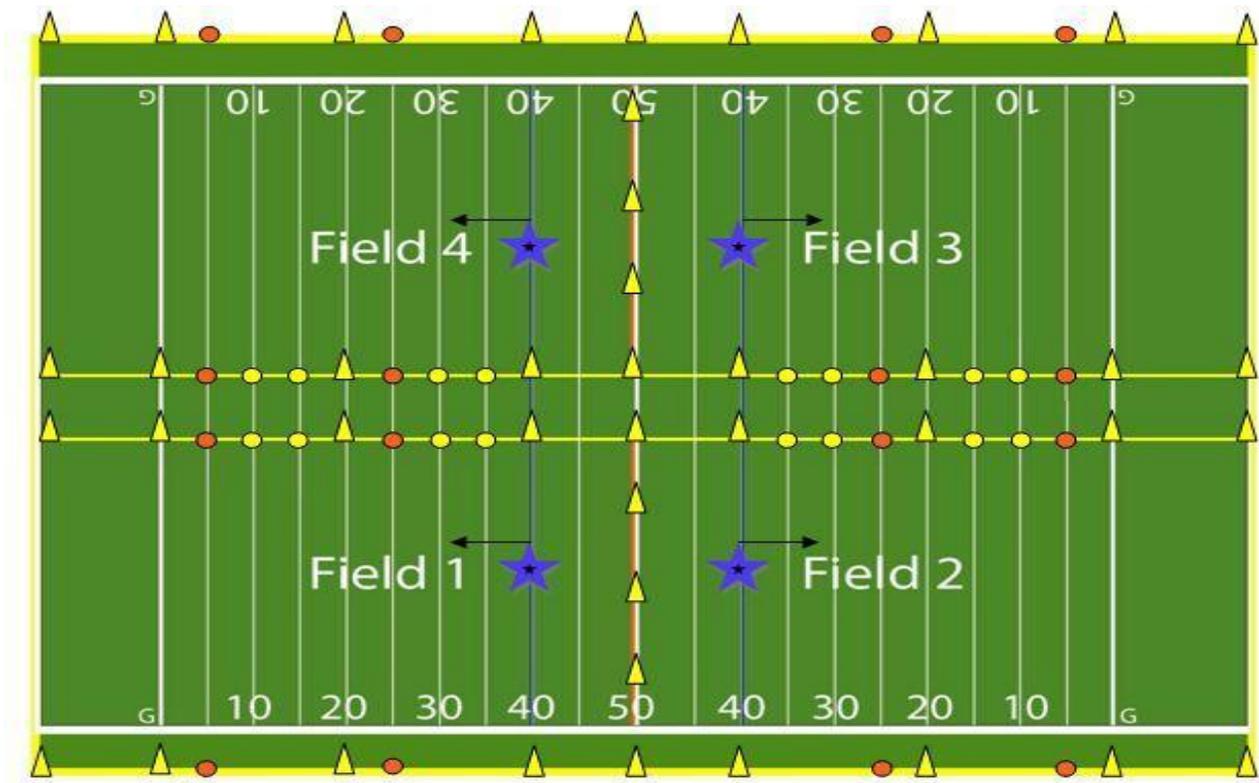
- A coin toss determines which team takes first possession of the ball. The designated away team for the game will call the coin toss. The winner of the toss has the option to begin on offense or defense. The team that begins on offense in the first half will begin on defense in the second half.
- Teams switch directions at the beginning of the second half (two-way field only).
- For each possession the offense has **three downs with a fourth down option** to obtain a first down at midfield, if midfield is obtained, the offense then has three more downs to reach the end zone.
- A first down is only obtained one of two ways; the offense reaches midfield within three downs with a fourth down option or a defensive penalty occurs with the result being an automatic first down.
- If the offense fails to reach midfield (first down line) or fails to reach the end zone, the result is a turnover.
- **Fourth down option** – On the first half of the field ONLY, a team has a fourth down decision to make. A team may either choose to "GO FOR IT" or to declare a "CHANGE OF POSSESSION". If a team decides to "GO FOR IT", they will have one play to cross midfield. If successful with this attempt, a first down will be awarded. If not, the opposing team will take possession of the ball at the point of the failed conversion.
- If a "CHANGE OF POSSESSION" is decided this will effectively end the drive resulting in a change of possession. The ball will be placed at either the 5 (two-way field) or 40 (one-way field) yard line depending on the field set up.

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### ONE WAY FIELD SET UP

- The playing field is 60 yards in total length by 25 yards in total width.
- Most possessions (including interceptions) will begin on the 40-yard line. **Exception:** a failed Fourth Down conversion.
- There are NO safeties on One Way fields. The ball will be spotted at the 40-yard line.
- In no circumstance will field position begin further back than the 40-yard line. If there is a sack or fumble, behind the 40- yard line of scrimmage, the ball will be placed back on the 40-yard line.
- Home and away teams will set up on opposing sidelines.
- All parents are required to watch from the stands. Coaches are asked to assist us with the enforcement of this rule.

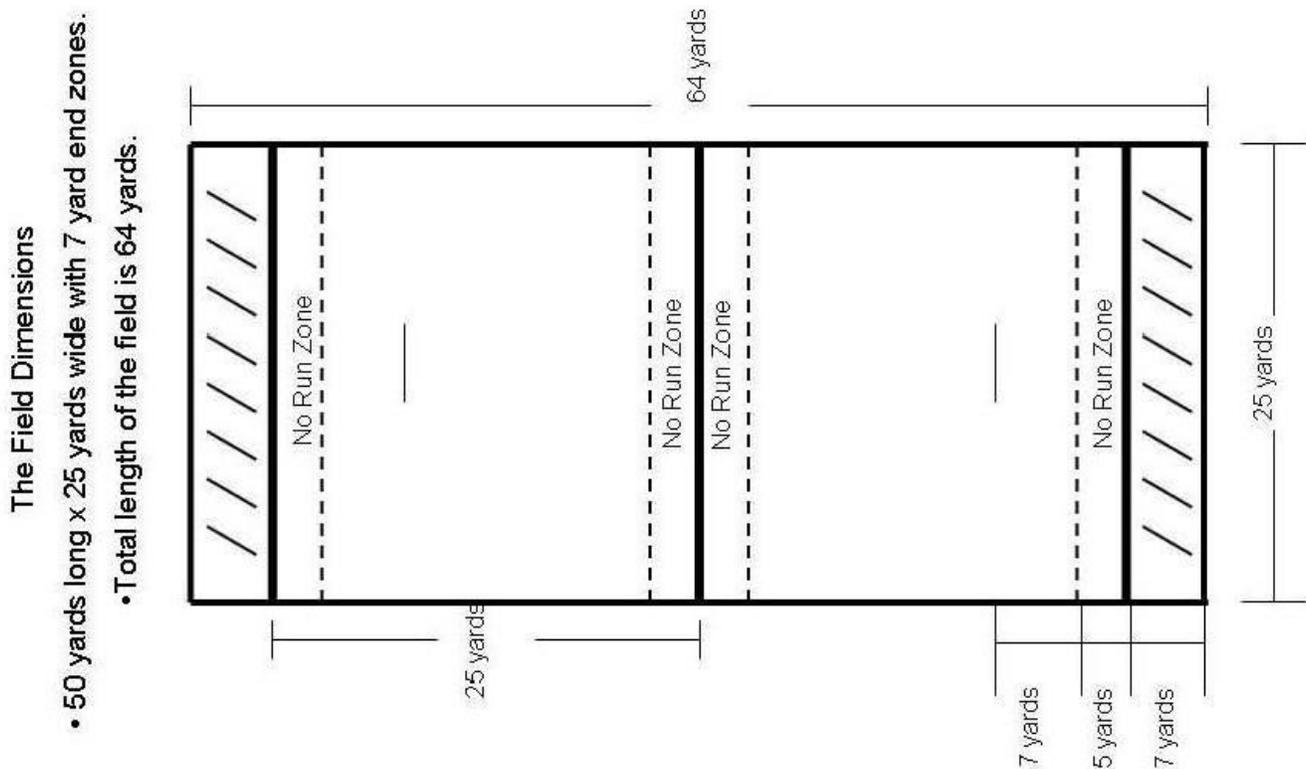


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### TWO WAY FIELD SET UP

- Most possession changes will start at the offensive team's 5-yard line. **Exception:** Interceptions can be returned and the ball will be placed at the spot the ball was when the interceptor's flag was pulled.
- A safety occurs when one of the following happens; the QB or ball carrier is downed in his/her end zone, the QB or ball carrier runs out of bounds inside his/her end zone, the quarterback or ball carrier fumbles the ball in his/her end zone, a bad snap resulting in the ball landing in offensive end zone, and an offensive penalty occurring inside the offensive end zone.
- A 5-yard (15 feet) buffer zone is in place during all games. This buffer zone completely surrounds the playing field. This zone assists in maintaining the safety of our players and spectators during game play. Only coaches, players, and league personnel are allowed within this zone during the game. Coaches are asked to assist us with the enforcement of this rule.
- Home and away teams will set up on opposing sidelines.



### GENERAL OFFENSE

- **NO INTENTIONAL CONTACT** of any kind is permitted and may also result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty, and/or player ejection.
- Downfield blocking is illegal. Any offensive player who continues running **AND** impedes the progress of a defensive player who is attempting to pull the ball carrier's flag will be called for illegal blocking.
- The ball must be snapped between the center's legs to start a play. Shotgun snaps are allowed.
- There is a **45-second huddle clock**, which starts once the line of scrimmage is marked and the ball is spotted.
- Only one player is allowed in motion at a time. All motion must be parallel to the line of scrimmage and no motion is permitted towards the line of scrimmage. A motioned player does NOT need to stop, prior to the snap of the ball.
- Spinning is permitted.
- Jumping or diving to **ADVANCE** the ball is illegal. However, an offensive player may jump over a defensive player on the ground to avoid a collision. Jumping or diving to catch a pass is permitted.

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- The ball will be spotted at the location of where the ball was when the flag was separated from the belt.

### PASSING GAME

- QB has a seven (7) second "pass clock."
- If the pass is not thrown within seven seconds, the play is ruled dead, with the down consumed. The ball is placed back at the original line of scrimmage.
- If the ball is handed off, the seven-second pass rule is no longer in effect.
- Passes must be thrown behind the line of scrimmage, the QB's feet must also remain behind the line of scrimmage. Failure to comply, results in a loss of down.
- Only one forward pass per down. All passes must be forward and received beyond the line of scrimmage.
- A lateral is a sideways or backwards pass. Therefore, no laterals are allowed.
- Shovel passes are allowed but must be received BEYOND the line of scrimmage.

### RECEIVING GAME

- All players are eligible to receive passes, including the QB, but only if the ball has been handed off behind the line of scrimmage first.
- A player who gains possession of the ball in the air is considered in bounds as long as the first foot or other body part contacts the ground in the field of play.
- A receiver is down where his or her flag belt is pulled.
- To achieve a first down, or a touchdown, the ball must cross the plane of the first down line and/or goal line.
- If a receiver's flag inadvertently falls off, even without contact from another player, that player is ruled down at the spot the flag fell off.
- If a receiver's flag inadvertently falls off prior to receiving the ball and later in the same play catches the ball without replacing the flag, the receiver will be down immediately at the point of reception.
- In the event that a receiver and defender both catch the ball at the same time, and both retain possession to the ground, then the tie would go to the receiver, with the receiver being down at the point of the tied reception.
- A receiver can't willingly run out of bounds and then come back in bounds to catch a ball.

### RUNNING GAME

- Only "direct" handoffs behind the line of scrimmage are legal. Anyone behind the line of scrimmage can receive a handoff. A player must completely let go of the ball, to be considered a legal handoff.
- There is no limit to the number of handoffs that can be performed by the offense in a single play, so long as the ball never crosses the line of scrimmage.
- The QB can run the ball only if he/she has first handed the ball off behind the line of scrimmage and then taken a "direct" handoff back from another player before the ball has ever crossed the line of scrimmage.
- The player who takes the handoff can throw the ball, as long as he or she does not pass the line of scrimmage first.
- It is the responsibility of the ball carrier to avoid colliding with defenders that lie in his/her path. Unintentional contact will not be penalized, provided the ball carrier makes an effort to avoid it. Failure to attempt to avoid contact with a defender (charging) may be penalized. Intentional contact will not be tolerated, and may also result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty, and/or player ejection.

### GENERAL DEFENSE

- **NO INTENTIONAL CONTACT** of any kind is permitted and may also result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty, and/or player ejection.
- Defensive players cannot pass the line of scrimmage, until the ball is handed off. **\*Exception: Madden Division**
- Defenders must only attempt to grab an offensive player's flags when trying to get them down.
- If a defender attempts to pull an offensive player's flags and inadvertently grabs their jersey, the defender must immediately and completely release the jersey before they can reattempt to pull the flag. Failure to do so will result in a holding penalty.
- All defensive players must give the offense a one-yard cushion prior to the snap of the ball. Diving after a flag **IS** allowed.

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### FLAG PULLING/GUARDING

- **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, arm, or shoulder or covering the flags with the football jersey.
- A legal flag pull takes place when the ball carrier is in full possession of the ball.
- Defenders can dive to pull flags, but cannot tackle, hold or run through the ball carrier when pulling flags.
- It is illegal to attempt to strip or pull the ball from the ball carrier's possession at any time.
- A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off a player who is not in possession of the ball.
- The flag belts (not the flags themselves) must be secured to ensure they do not hang appearing to be a flag. If the belt is hanging, flag guarding may be called.
- Shirts/jerseys must be tucked in always. If a shirt/jersey is hanging out, flag guarding may be called.

### INTERCEPTIONS

- One-way fields will play with interceptions which will be spotted at the 40.
- **Two-way fields ONLY - Interceptions can be returned.**
  - In the event of an interception, all other defenders on the field must stop and cannot block or impede the offensive players from pursuing the ball carrier.
  - The ball will be spotted at the point the ball carrier is ruled down (flag is pulled, flag falls off, any part of the body other than the hand touches the ground, the ball is dropped, running out of bounds, a touchdown is scored, or a penalty is committed).

### NO RUN ZONES

- **"No Run Zones" are only enforced in the Madden Division.**
- "No Run Zones" are designed to avoid short-yardage situations.
- "No Run Zones" come into effect only when the offensive team is approaching a first down or the end zone. Exception: If the offensive team has already achieved a first down but has been pushed back into a "No Run Zone", then the "No Run Zone" is no longer in effect.
- Whenever within the "No Run Zone" the offense must pass.
- If a run play occurs while inside the "No Run Zone", the play is immediately dead with the consumption of a down.

### RUSHING OF THE QUARTERBACK

- **You may only rush the quarterback in the Madden Division.**
- The rush marker will be designated by the referee seven yards from the line of scrimmage.
- Any number of players may rush the quarterback as long as they are behind the rush marker when the ball is snapped.
- If the offense draws the rusher(s) to jump the seven-yard marker prior to the snap of the ball, that rusher(s) **CANNOT** rush during that play. However, any other defender that is seven yards back may rush instead. Jumping the rush is not considered a penalty until the rusher crosses the line of scrimmage prior to a hand off or a passed ball.
- The rusher must take an angled path to the QB. If this path is crossed AND contact is made involving the rusher and any offensive player, then an offensive impeding penalty will be assessed.
- Once the rusher angle is set, he/she cannot change their path to the QB. If the path is changed, they will lose right of way privileges. This means that if any contact is made, it will be called against the initiating player.
- The rusher **CANNOT** run straight into the center. The center has the right of way so long as the center remains at the in his/her original spot at the time the ball was snapped.
- If contact is made with the center by the rusher who has not taken an angle to the quarterback, a defensive impeding penalty will be assessed.
- Players not rushing the quarterback may defend the line of scrimmage.
- The rusher may attempt to block the pass, but it is a penalty to make contact with the quarterback's arm.

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### REPLAY OF DOWN/INADVERTENT WHISTLE

- If there is an inadvertent whistle during a play, the offense has the choice of either the result of the play at the **point** the whistle was blown or replaying the down.
- If there is an inadvertent whistle during a passing play and the ball is in flight, the down is replayed.
- **Lombardi Division Only:** If a 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.

### DEAD BALLS

- A play is ruled dead when the ball carrier’s flag is pulled, the ball carrier’s flag inadvertently falls off, the ball carrier steps out of bounds, any part of the ball carrier’s body other than hands touch the ground, the ball carrier lets the ball hit the ground, a penalty occurs, QB runs out of time, inadvertent whistle, or after a touchdown or extra point is scored.
- There are no fumbles. The ball is spotted where the ball hits the ground, unless the ball carrier loses control of the ball moving forward. It will be placed where the carrier’s feet are when possession is lost.

### SCORING

- A touchdown is equivalent to 6 points.

### EXTRA POINTS

- Following a touchdown, the offensive team is given an opportunity to score an extra point.
- 1 Extra Point is attempted five yards out from the goal line. **This is a “NO RUN” zone in the Madden Division.**
- 2 Extra Points are attempted 12 yards out from the goal line.
- An interception on an extra point will result in a failed attempt.

### SAFETIES

- **TWO-WAY FIELDS** will play with the possibility of safeties. There are no safeties on ONE-WAY FIELDS.
- A safety occurs when one of the following happens; the QB or ball carrier is downed in his/her end zone, the QB or ball carrier runs out of bounds inside his/her end zone, the quarterback or ball carrier fumbles the ball in his/her end zone, a bad snap resulting in the ball landing in offensive end zone, and an offensive penalty occurring inside the offensive end zone.
- If a safety occurs, the team that scored the safety will be awarded 2 points and will receive the ball on their 5-yard line.

### TIME SITUATIONS

- The referee may stop the clock at their own discretion.
- Each team is allowed one 60-second timeout per half.
- Timeouts do NOT carry over into the next half.
- Games are played with two 24-minute halves and a two-minute half-time. **Indoor leagues** may play with a running clock. Times may vary from location to location.
  - **EXCEPTIONS ROUND ROBIN:** league play games will be played with two 14-minute halves and a two-minute half-time. Teams will play two opponents in double header fashion each week. This is normally used when there are only 3 teams in a division.
- The clock will also stop during the final minute of the second half of an 8-point differential game, to set the puck(s), for an incompletion, out of bounds, an extra point attempt, a penalty, a change of possession, when a first down is obtained.

### OVERTIME

- There is NO OVERTIME in recreational league play.

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### MERCY PRECAUTIONS

- Mercies are discouraged in this league. Coaches are asked to do what they can to avoid this result. In an attempt to assist with the prevention of a mercy in recreational play, we have implemented the following:
  - If at any point during the game, there is a 28-point differential, the winning team will forfeit a defensive player. The winning team will only play with 4 players on defense until the point differential is lowered below 28 points or a mercy has been declared.
  - The losing team may add a 6<sup>th</sup> player to their defense until the point differential is lowered below 28 points or a mercy has been declared.
- A Mercy is declared once a 35-point differential has been obtained. The game is officially declared over.

### FORFEITS

- In order to keep games on time, teams arriving more than ten minutes later than their originally scheduled start time will forfeit the game. However, when said team does arrive, though the game is officially over, both teams may agree to play a scrimmage with the remaining game time.
- Teams are required to have a minimum of four players to play a game; if a team is unable to field at least four players the game will be forfeited. However, if both teams agree, they may use the remaining game time to scrimmage.

### PROTEST RULE

- A coach has the right to protest one rule interpretation per game. The head coach **MUST show the rule in question to the head official** and call a “**Protest Time Out**”. The protest must take place before the next play starts. The official must stop the clock and read the rule in question. If no agreeable solution is determined, then an event liaison may arbitrate and will have the final say. If a team protests a rule interpretation and is proven wrong, the team will be charged a timeout. If the team doesn’t have a timeout then that team will be penalized for delay of game. **Note; you cannot protest a judgement call. A judgement call is at the official’s discretion.**

### GENERAL PENALTY INFORMATION

- Only head coaches may approach the referee. Judgment calls cannot be argued.
- A game or half will not end on any accepted live ball defensive penalty or inadvertent whistle.
- Any offensive penalty in your own end zone results in a safety (2 points) on a two-way field only.
- A second penalty on an extra point, will equate to the number of points the offensive team was attempting and be awarded.
- If the offense throws an interception and commits an infraction after the interception, when the opposing team takes offensive possession, they will get an additional 5 yards from the line of scrimmage.

### WARNINGS

- At the official’s discretion a warning may be given in place of a penalty to a player or coach for any of the stated rules. Coaches and players should not expect to receive more than one warning if any.

### OFFENSIVE PENALTIES - 5 Yards from Line of Scrimmage and Loss of that Down

- False start
- Offsides
- Illegal motion
- Offensive impeding
- Delay of game
- Coach interference – (remaining on the field during a play, exception: Lombardi Division may have 1 coach)
- Attempting to run from a “No Run Zone”

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- Offensive pass interference
- Too many players on the field
- Improper equipment - (equipment tampering, lack of mouth guard, pants or shorts with pockets, jersey untucked, illegal cleats, missing or improperly placed flags)

### **OFFENSIVE PENALTIES - 5 Yards from the Spot of Infraction and Loss of that Down**

- Flag guarding
- Illegal ball advancement – (jumping or diving to advance the ball, laterals)
- Intentional contact – (blocking, charging, tackling, tripping, pushing, holding, obstructing, stiff arming)

### **DEFENSIVE PENALTIES - 5 Yards from the Line of Scrimmage, Automatic First Down**

- Roughing the passer
- Intentionally removing a receiver's flag belt before he/she contacts the ball
- Illegally rushing the quarterback
- Too many players on the field
- Coach interference – (remaining on the field during a play)
- Improper equipment - (equipment tampering, lack of mouth guard, pants or shorts with pockets, jersey untucked, illegal cleats, missing or improperly placed flags)

### **DEFENSIVE PENALTIES - 5 Yards from the Spot of Infraction, Automatic First Down**

- Defensive pass interference
- Intentional contact – (blocking, charging, tackling, tripping, pushing, holding, obstructing, stiff arming)

### **UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT -**

- If the event liaison or referee witnesses any acts of intentional contact, tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, blocking 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!**
- Offensive or confrontational language is not allowed. Officials have the right to determine offensive language. If offensive or confrontational language occurs, the referee will give one warning. If it continues, the player or players will be ejected from the game.
- Players, coaches, and spectators may not physically or verbally abuse any player, coach, official, spectator, or staff member.
- Ball-carriers **MUST** make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position.
- Defenders are not allowed to run through the ball-carrier when pulling flags.
- Fans must also adhere to good sportsmanship:
  - Yell to cheer on your players, not to harass officials, participants, coaches, staff, or other spectators.
  - Keep comments clean and profanity free.
  - Compliment ALL players, not just one child or team.

### **DEFENSIVE UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT- 15 Yards from End of Play, Automatic First Down**

### **OFFENSIVE UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT- 15 Yards from Line of Scrimmage and Loss of Down**

### **EJECTIONS**

- Flagrant unsportsmanlike conduct or personal fouls (tackling, pass interference, charging, intentional contact).
- Intentionally tampering with equipment.
- At the official's discretion, a player or a coach may be ejected from the field for unsportsmanlike conduct or any flagrant violation of the rules. To eject a player or a coach the referee will call an official's time out and get the event liaison **PRIOR** to making this call.
- Any person ejected will be asked to leave the field before play resumes. If an ejected player/fan/parent does not leave the field, a delay of game penalty will be called and will continue to be called until the situation is addressed.

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- Any player or coach ejected may be put on probation with possible suspension for the remainder of the event, season, or program depending upon the severity of the incident. National Flag Football will have full discretion when imposing penalties.

### **SPORTSMANSHIP**

- Trash talking is not allowed. Trash talking is offensive language used against coaches, players, officials, league personnel, or spectators. Disciplinary action may be taken.
- If any league personnel or official witness any act of rough housing, including but not limited to, tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, intentional contact, or any other unsportsmanlike act, the game will be stopped, and that player may be ejected. Further disciplinary action may follow including league expulsion.
- After the game, teams are expected to form a line at midfield and congratulate the opposing team regardless of the outcome of the game.

National Flag Football has and always will provide an atmosphere where players, friends, and families can feel comfortable enjoying a day of football. Any coaches, players, or spectators that jeopardize that environment will be asked to leave. National Flag Football operates under a **ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY**.