

# **NFL Flag Official Rule Book**

## **Frederick County Division of Parks and Recreation**

### **Game**

- At the start of each game, captains from both teams shall meet at midfield for the coin toss to determine who shall start with the ball. The visiting team shall call the toss.
- The winner of the coin toss has the choice of offense or defense. The loser of the coin toss has the choice of direction. Teams may not choose to defer to the second half.
- The offensive team takes possession of the ball at its 5-yard line and has four (4) plays to cross midfield. Once a team crosses midfield, they have three (3) plays to score a touchdown.
- If the offense fails to score after crossing midfield, the ball changes possession and the new offensive team starts its drive on its own 5-yard line.
- 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. 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. Any time prior to making the ball ready for play on 4th down, the referee must ask the coach to declare "PUNT or PLAY". The coach must answer immediately or risk a delay of game penalty at that time.
- Teams change sides after the first half. Possession changes to the team that started the game on defense.



## Terminology

- Boundary Lines the outer perimeter lines around the field. They include the sidelines, and back of the end zone lines.
- 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 line the offense must pass to get a first down or score.
- Rush Line an imaginary line running across the width of the field 7 yards (into the defensive side) from the line of scrimmage.
- Offense the squad with possession of the ball.
- Defense the squad opposing the offense to prevent them from advancing the ball.
- Passer the offensive player that throws the ball and may or may not be the quarterback.
- Rusher 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.
- Possession the team having control of the ball and trying to score during a play or overall series of downs
- 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 refers to the period of time immediately before or after a play.
- Whistle sound made by an official using a whistle that signifies the end of the play or a stop in the action for a timeout, half time, or the end of the game.
- Inadvertent Whistle official's whistle that is performed in error.
- Charging the movement of the ball carrier directly at a defensive player who has established
- position on the field. This includes lowering the head, making contact with the defender with a shoulder, forearm, or the chest.
- Flag Guarding an 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 or arm.
- Shovel Pass a legal pass attempted by pushing it towards a receiver in a shot-put type manner. Shovel passes will now be legal with a 2 handed release. The ball still has to go beyond LOS.



- Lateral a backwards or sideways toss of the ball by the ball carrier. Laterals are permitted behind the line of scrimmage
- Unsportsmanlike Conduct a rude, confrontational, or offensive behavior or language.

## Eligibility

- All players' legal guardians must agree to the online waiver form at [NFLFLAG.com](http://NFLFLAG.com) for their specific league before participating.

## Equipment

- The league provides each player with a flag belt and NFL FLAG powered by USA Football NFL jersey. Teams will use the football provided by their league.
- Players must wear shoes. Cleats are allowed, however cleats with exposed metal are not allowed and must be removed.
- No tape on forearms, hands, and fingers or elbow pads allowed. Casts must be bubble wrapped and approved by referee. Casts must be bubble wrapped for participation in any practices as well as games.
- Players must remove all watches, earrings, and any other jewelry that the officials deem hazardous.
- Official NFL FLAG powered by USA Football NFL jerseys must be worn during play.
- Players' jerseys must be tucked into the pants if they hang below the belt line.



- Pants or shorts with belt loops or pockets must be taped. No player can wear green or yellow shorts. Game day flags are green or yellow. Officials may change the flag color for any children as needed and if available.
- Mouth pieces are mandatory!
- No shorts with pockets or must be shut with duct tape (no exception)
- No Towels or any other items are allowed on the player's flag belts or tucked into waists.

## Field

- The field dimensions are 30 yards by 70 yards with two 10-yard end zones, and a midfield line-to-gain.
- No-Run Zones precede each line-to-gain by 5 yards. However, field size may vary based on field availability for each league.
- No-Run Zones are in place to prevent teams from conducting power run plays while in the No-Run Zone (a 5-yard imaginary zone before midfield and end zones), teams cannot run the ball in any fashion. All plays must be passing plays, even with a handoff. \*No-Run zones are not enforced for the 5-6 age group only.
- Stepping on the boundary line is considered out of bounds.
- Each offensive squad approaches only TWO No-Run Zones in each drive (one zone 5 yards from midfield to gain the first down, and one zone 5 yards from the goal line to score a TD).



- The ball will be placed in the middle of the field to start every play. The ball may be moved toward either boundary by the referee if asked by the offense before the ‘ready for play’. The ball may not be spotted less than 10-yards from either boundary.
- Spectators must stand or sit behind the dashed “parent lines” on the sideline opposite of the teams. Smoking is not permitted on player’s or spectator sidelines.
- When games are held at a synthetic turf facility, spectators are not allowed on the turf – only coaches, players, and refs.

## Rosters

- Home teams wear dark color jerseys; visiting teams wear light color jerseys.
- Teams must consist of at least five players.
- Teams must start a game with a minimum of five players. In the event of an injury, a team with insufficient substitute players may play with four players on the field, but no fewer than four. If less than 4 players are fielded a scrimmage may be played. However, the team with less than 4 players has already forfeited the game.

## Timing

- Games consist of 2 20-minute halves. Running clock.
- Halftime is one minute.



- Each time the ball is spotted, a team has 25 seconds to snap the ball. Referee must also set the 7yd rush line prior to starting play clock. Teams may receive warning before a delay-of-game penalty is enforced.
- Each team has two 30-second timeouts per game.
- Officials can stop the clock at their discretion.
- In the event of an injury the clock will stop and then restart when the injured player is removed from the field of play.
- If the score is tied at the end of 40 minutes, an overtime period will be used to determine a winner ONLY in Tournament play. The game will end as a tie in regular season play.

## OT Format

- Home team calls the coin toss to determine the team that chooses to be on offense or defense first.
- 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 and defense to start out during every round of overtime.
- The referee will determine which end of the field the overtime will take place on.
- 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.



- 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.
- Both teams must “go for two” from the 10-yard line starting with the second round of overtime.
- 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.
- All regulation period rules and penalties are in effect.
- There are no timeouts.
- Interceptions are returnable in OT, and worth 2 points.
- Both teams must have an offensive possession in OT. (Example- if first possession results in interception that is returned, the must still take an offensive possession.)

## Scoring

- Touchdown: 6 points
- PAT (Point After Touchdown) 1 point (5-yard line) or 2 points (10-yard line) Note: 1 point PAT is pass only, 2 point PAT can be run or pass. If the result of a defensive penalty on a 2pt try moves the ball up to the 5 yard line, the second try becomes pass only, but still counts for 2 points.



- Safety: 2 points
  - A Safety occurs when the ball carrier is declared down in his/her own end zone. They can be called down when their flags are pulled by a defensive player, their flag falls out, they step out of bounds or they hit the ground with their knee or arm. A Safety also occurs when there is an offensive penalty in the end zone. If a dead-ball takes place in the end zone it is ruled a safety (for example – an errant snap goes over the head of the QB and the ball lands in the endzone. would be ruled a safety)
- Extra points that are returned equals 2 points.
- A team that scores a touchdown must declare whether it wishes to attempt a 1-point conversion or a 2-point conversion. 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.
- Regular season: if at anytime during the first or second half a team is up 28 points, the game is over. Teams can still scrimmage for remainder of timeslot, but will have no refs. The field will need to be cleared 20 minutes prior to the next game. No exceptions!
- Forfeits are scored 28-0 for the winning team.

## Coaches

- Coaches are expected to adhere to FCPR and NFL Flag philosophies, coaching guidelines and codes of conduct.
- Only two coaches per team are allowed on the sidelines.



- 5/6 and 7/8 only: one coach is allowed on field per off/def, but must be off field prior to snap (no exceptions)
- Any coach or parent leading or working with kids at a practice and/or a game must first be cleared via a
- nationwide background through the recreation department once each calendar year.
- Referees will eject coaches based on the following 3 step process. Warning at coin toss (step 1), unsportsmanlike
- conduct penalty (step 2), ejection (step 3).
  - If a coach, parent, or player is ejected, they must leave the premises for the day regardless of any other
- games that are scheduled that day.
- Electronic communication of any kind is prohibited and will result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty. Will result in automatic disqualification.

## Live Ball / Dead Ball

- The ball is live at the snap of the ball and remains live until the official whistles the ball dead.
- The official will indicate the neutral zone and line of scrimmage. It is an automatic dead ball foul if any player on defense or offense enters the neutral zone. Regarding 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.
- A player who gains possession in the air is considered in bounds if one foot comes down in the field of play.



- 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 penalty.
- Substitutions may be made on any dead ball.
- Any official can whistle the play dead.
- Play is ruled “dead” when:
  - the ball hits the ground. 5/6 ONLY: will have 1 do over on snap with no LOSS OF DOWN. Next snap counts and will be LOSS OF DOWN if not executed.
  - 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 or arm hits the ground.
  - The ball carrier’s flag falls out.
  - The receiver catches the ball while in possession of one or no flag(s).



- The ball carrier loses possession of ball and ends up in the hands of a defender (defender cannot advance).
- There is an illegal lateral or pitch. The ball is placed where the referee judges the ball left the player's hand.
- The 7 second pass clock expires. (ref will give hand signal for each second) i. Inadvertent whistle.
- QB has 7 seconds to pass after the snap or ball is called dead at LOS (refs will give a verbal 7 secs count).
- 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.
- NOTE: Fumbles/ loss of possession: ground contact must be made for the play to be dead. "A fumble is loss of possession by a player resulting in the ball contacting the ground". The ball is spotted where the ball carrier's feet were at the time of the fumble. In the case of an inadvertent whistle, the offense has two options:
  - Take the ball where it was when the whistle blew, and the down is consumed.
  - Replay the down from the original line of scrimmage. If this occurs on the last play of the half or game, the offense will be awarded one untimed down and given those two options.



## Running

- The ball is spotted where the ball is when the flag is pulled.
- The quarterback cannot directly run with the ball. The quarterback is the offensive player that receives the snap.
- 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.
  - “Center Sneak” play – is not allowed. The QB is not allowed to handoff to the center on the first handoff of the play.
- “No-Run Zones,” located 5 yards before each end zone and 5 yards on either side of midfield are designed to avoid short-yardage power-running situations. Teams are not allowed to run in these zones if the subsequent line is LIVE. (Reminder: Each offensive squad approaches only TWO No-Run Zones in each drive – one 5 yards from
- midfield to gain the first down, and one 5 yards from the goal line to score a TD).
  - 5/6 ONLY: can run ball anywhere on field, even in pass only zones.
- The player who takes the handoff can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage.
- Once the ball has been handed off in front, behind or to the side of the quarterback, all defensive players are eligible to rush.



- Runners may not leave their feet to advance the ball. Diving, leaping, or jumping to avoid a flag pull will result in a dead ball.
- Spinning is allowed, but players cannot leave their feet to avoid a flag pull. a. Players spinning out of control will be called for flag guarding.
- Runners may leave their feet if there is a clear indication that he/she has done so to avoid collision with another player without a flag guarding penalty enforced.
- Pitches, laterals, and backwards passes are permitted behind the line of scrimmage only. Laterals or pitches are not permitted beyond the line of scrimmage and will be blown dead. The ball will be placed where the referee judges the ball left the player's hand.
- No blocking or “screening” is allowed at any time.
- Offensive players without the ball must stop their motion once the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage. No running with the ball-carrier.
- 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.

## **Passing**

- Only 1 forward pass, thrown from behind the line of scrimmage (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. Passes may be thrown backwards behind the LOS. There is no intentional grounding. The quarterback may throw the ball anywhere across the LOS to avoid a sack. All forward passes that do not cross the LOS are illegal forward passes, unless touched by a defender. All forward



passes must go beyond the LOS. Shovel passes are allowed and must be a forward pass, from behind the LOS, and received beyond the LOS. The quarterback has a 7 second “pass clock.” If a pass is not thrown within 7 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 7 second rule is no longer in effect. If the QB is standing in the end zone at the end of the 7 second clock, the ball is returned to the LOS. If the quarterback throws the ball and then catches it, the play is dead and treated like an incomplete pass.

## **Receiving**

- All players are eligible to receive passes (including the quarterback if the ball has been handed off behind the line of scrimmage).
- 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 player must have at least one foot inbounds when making a reception.
- In the case of simultaneous possession by both an offensive and defensive player, possession is awarded to the offense.
- Interceptions are returnable on conversions after touchdowns.

## **Rushing the Passer**

- All players who rush the passer must be a minimum of seven yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped. Rushers must now identify themselves by raising their hand pre-snap. Rush MUST be immediate. NO delayed rushing permitted. (Safety) Maximum of 2 players can rush the quarterback per play. Players not rushing the quarterback may defend on the line of scrimmage.
- 5/6 and 7/8 ONLY: no rush line. Defenders can only cross LOS after ball is handed off.



- 5/6 ONLY: all defensive players must line up 5 yards off LOS.
- 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.
- 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 crosses the line of scrimmage before a handoff or pass – Illegal Rush (5 yards from LOS and first down).
    - ii. Any defensive player crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped – Offside (5 yards from LOS and first down).
    - 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 LOS and first down).
    - iv. 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 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, seven second clock in effect
    - 4. Players rushing the quarterback may attempt to block a pass; however, NO contact can be made with the quarterback in any way. Blocking the pass or attempting to block the pass and then making contact with the passer will result in a roughing the passer penalty.
    - 5. Impeding the rusher: The offense cannot impede the rusher in anyway. The rusher has the right to a clear path to the QB, regardless of where they line up prior to the snap. This direct “path or line” to the QB is determined by where the defender and QB are lined up pre snap. If this line is occupied by an offensive player (besides the center), then it is the offensive’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, it is the rusher’s responsibility to avoid them.
    - 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.

## Flag Pulling

- 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.
- If a player's flag inadvertently falls off during the play, the player is down immediately upon possession of the ball and the play ends.
- A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off of a player who is not in possession of the ball.
- 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, shoulder, or intentionally covering the flags with the jersey. (A player's running motion is not a justification to flag guard.)

## Formations

- Offense 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. One player at a time may go in motion and parallel to the line of scrimmage.
- b. No motion is allowed towards the line of scrimmage.



- 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.
- 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.
- For 5-6 age group only – defenders must line up at least 5 yards behind the line of scrimmage. Reduced to 3-yards any time the ball is spotted on or inside the 5-yard line

## **Unsportsmanlike Conduct**

- If the field monitor or referee witnesses any acts of intentional 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 illegal. Officials have the right to determine offensive language. If offensive or confrontational language occurs, the player, coach, or spectator will be ejected from the game.
- \*Any individual who is ejected must leave the premises for the remainder of the day (regardless of any remaining scheduled games that day). An ejection also results in a one game suspension the following week (will carry over to the next season the individual participates in if an ejection takes place during a playoff game).
- Players may not physically or verbally abuse any opponent, coach or official.
- 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, as well:
  - Yell to cheer on your players, not to harass officials or other teams.
  - Keep comments clean and profanity free.
  - Compliment ALL players, not just one child or team.
- Fans are required to keep fields safe and kids friendly:
  - Keep younger kids and equipment such as coolers, chairs and tents a minimum of 10 yards off the field in the end zone or spectator area. No tents allowed on player's sidelines – no exceptions!
  - Stay in the end zone or sideline area, not between fields.
- Unsportsmanlike conduct penalties:
  - Defense: +10 yards from LOS and first down.
  - Offense: -10 yards from the line of scrimmage and loss of down.

## Penalties

- The referee will call all penalties.
- Referees determine incidental contact that may result from normal run of play.
- All penalties will be assessed from the line of scrimmage, except as noted. (Spot fouls)
- Only the team captain or head coach may ask the referee questions about rule clarification and interpretations. Players/Coaches may not question judgment call s. 5. Games may not end on a defensive penalty, unless the offense declines it.
- Penalties are assessed live ball then dead ball. Live ball penalties must be assessed before play is considered complete.
- Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal yardage when the penalty yardage is more than half the distance to the goal.



- Referees have the option to sit a player 4 plays, 8 plays, or for the rest of the half for poor sportsmanship or unnecessary roughness.

# Spot Fouls

## Defensive Penalties

- Offside + 5 yards from LOS & Automatic First Down
- Illegal Rush (starting rush from inside 7-yd mark) + 5 yards from LOS & Automatic First Down
- Illegal Flag Pull (before receiver has ball) + 5 yards from LOS & Automatic First Down
- Roughing the Passer + 5 yards from LOS & Automatic First Down
- Taunting + 5 yards from LOS & Automatic First Down
- Defensive Pass Interference
- Illegal contact SPOT FOUL, Automatic First Down
- SPOT FOUL +5 yards and Automatic First Down
- Stripping SPOT FOUL +5 yards and Automatic First Down
- Defensive Unnecessary Roughness SPOT FOUL +10 yards and Automatic First Down

## Offensive Penalties

- Offside / False Start - 5 yards from LOS & Loss of Down
- Illegal Forward Pass (Passer throws after stepping across LOS & if ball does not cross LOS, including a pass out of bounds) - 5 yards from LOS & Loss of Down
- Illegal Motion (more than 1 player moving) - 5 yards from LOS & Loss of Down



- Delay of game - 5 yards from LOS & Loss of Down
- Charging - 5 yards from LOS & Loss of Down
- Impeding the Rusher - 5 yards from LOS & Loss of Down
- Offensive Pass Interference
- Illegal contact - 5 yards from LOS & Loss of Down
- SPOT FOUL -5 yards and Loss of Down
- Offensive Unnecessary Roughness - 10 yards from LOS & Loss of Down
- Screening & Blocking SPOT FOUL -5 yards and Loss of Down
- Flag Guarding SPOT FOUL -5 yards and Loss of Down

## **Weather Policies and Cancellation Information**

- Games may be played rain or shine. However, certain inclement weather situations may cause us to postpone and/or cancel games. When inclement weather is forecasted, you should call our Program Status Line (see below) before leaving for your game/practice location.
- Program Status Line 301.600.6291 (updated only if an activity is cancelled) we do not update the line to let you know if games are running. If the cancellation does not state it is cancelled, then it is running as scheduled).

## **Thunderstorms & Lightning**

- “When Thunder Roars, Get Indoors.” FCPR Staff and Volunteers will suspend or postpone activities if a thunderstorm appears imminent before or during outdoor activities. If thunder can be heard, lightning is close enough to be a hazard and everyone should head to
- a safe location immediately. Allowing sufficient time for individuals to safely evacuate the premises must be taken into consideration by staff and volunteers. All activities will be suspended until 30 minutes after the last sound of thunder is heard. This 30-minute clock restarts each time thunder is heard. Spectator and participants will be directed to the nearest safe location which in many instances will be their vehicles. Participants and spectators should only make their way back to a venue after an “all-clear” from FCPR Staff.

## **League Director**

- Keith Tapley O: 301.600.1784 / c 301.748.4635 / e [ktapley@frederickcountymd.gov](mailto:ktapley@frederickcountymd.gov)

