

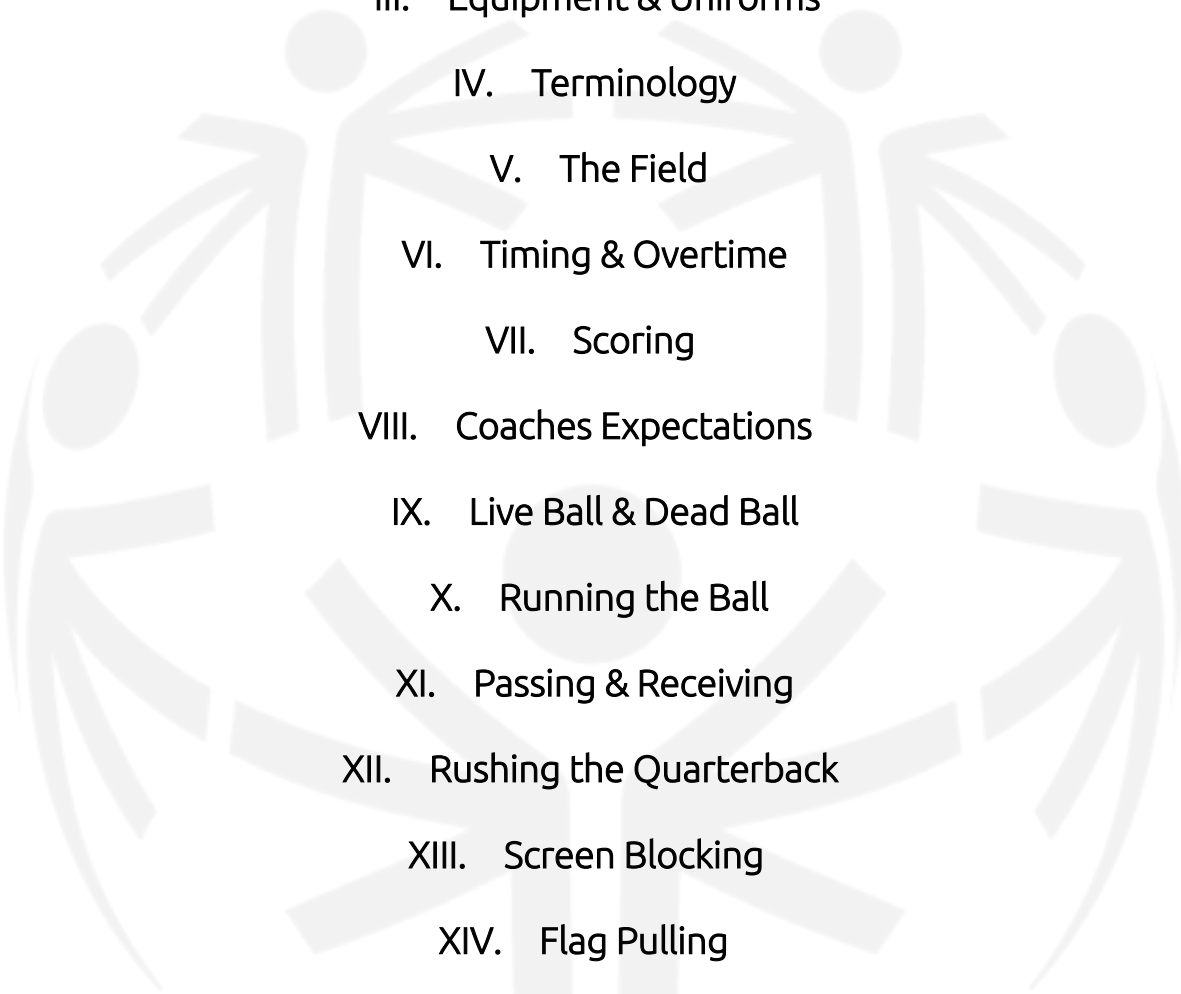


Official Flag Football Rules

Special Olympics
Tennessee



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I. Official Events

A. Special Olympics Tennessee Flag Football is offered in the following formats:

- a. Traditional Skills
- b. Unified Skills
- c. Traditional Team
- d. Unified Team

II. The Game

A. Special Olympics Tennessee flag football is a non-contact sport.

- a. In all aspects of SOTN flag football, rulings shall be made with player safety as the primary consideration.

B. The games shall be played between two (2) teams of five (5) players.

- a. Traditional Teams
 - i. The team roster can contain a maximum of ten (10) players.
 - ii. Each team must start the game with five (5) players on the field.
 - iii. Teams may continue with a minimum of four (4) players, if necessary due to disqualification or injury. The game may be continued with fewer players as long as the team has a chance to win (at the discretion of the game officials).
- b. Unified Teams
 - i. The team roster can contain a maximum of ten (10) players with a minimum of four (4) Unified partners.
 - ii. Each team must start the game with five (5) players on the field; three (3) athletes and two (2) Unified partners.
 - 1. Failure to adhere to the required ratio will result in a forfeit.
 - iii. Teams may continue with a minimum of four (4) players (minus one athlete or partner), if necessary due to disqualification or injury. The game may be continued with fewer players as long as the team has chance to win (at the discretion of the game officials). A minimum of one (1) athlete and one (1) partner is required.
- c. Substitutions
 - i. Any player on the roster may enter the game upon completion of a play (dead ball).
 - ii. Each substitute must play at least one (1) down prior to being replaced.
 - iii. A replaced player must leave the field immediately.

C. Points of Emphasis

- a. No team shall repeatedly commit penalties which halve the distance to the goal line.
- b. Neither team shall commit any act which, in the opinion of the referee, tends to make a travesty of the game. This includes committing penalties to gain an advantage.
- c. The referee will enforce any penalty they consider equitable, including the awarding of a score for an unfair act.

D. Coin Toss

- a. A coin toss determines first possession.
- b. Each team will provide two (2) captains.
- c. The officials and team captains will meet prior to the start of the contest to conduct the coin toss.
 - i. The visiting team captain will be given the choice of heads or tails by the official conducting the coin toss.
 - ii. The winner of the coin toss will have the choice of options for the first half or shall defer their option to the second half. The options for each half are as follows:
 - 1. To choose whether their team will start on offense or defense.
 - 2. To choose the goal their team will defend.

E. Possessions

- a. All possessions, except following an interception, start at the offensive team's five (5) yard line.
 - i. The offense has four (4) downs to cross mid-field.
 - ii. Once the offense crossed mid-field, they have four (4) additional downs to score a touchdown.
 - iii. If the offense fails to cross mid-field or score a touchdown in the prescribed number of downs, possession of the ball changes and the opposing team starts on their own five (5) yard line.

III. Equipment & Uniforms

A. Equipment

- a. Ball: Teams shall play with a pebble-grained leather or rubber covered ball in regular or intermediate/youth sizes.
- b. Mouthpiece: A protective mouthpiece is highly recommended.
- c. Flag Belt: Each player shall wear a one-piece quick release belt, without any knots, at the waistline with three (3) flags permanently attached, one (1) flag on each side and one (1) flag in the center of the back. The belt must have a spring-loaded clip, no detachable flags.

B. Uniforms

- a. All participants must have matching uniforms (shirts & shorts/pants).
 - i. Shirts must have numbers on the back and can be tucked into the waist to avoid obstruction of flag pulling.
 - ii. All players must wear athletic shorts/pants without pockets.
 - 1. No blue jeans will be allowed.
- b. Players must wear rubber/plastic cleated or flat soled athletic shoes.
 - i. Metal cleats, spikes, boots, or other equipment deemed dangerous by officials will not be allowed.
- c. No jewelry or hats with hard bills may be worn.
- d. Sunglasses should be non-rigid and pliable. Players wearing eyewear are strongly encouraged to utilize an eyewear strap that helps hold the glasses in place.
- e. The referee shall not permit any team member to wear equipment or apparel which, in their judgment, is dangerous or confusing to other players or is not appropriate. Reasonable accommodation can be made for unique or extenuating circumstances. The accommodations should not fundamentally alter the sport, heighten the risk to participants, or place opponents at a disadvantage.
- f. Headbands and/or wristbands must be black, white, or a single solid color matching the uniform color.
- g. No advertising or sponsorship is allowed to be worn on competition uniforms or warmup jerseys.

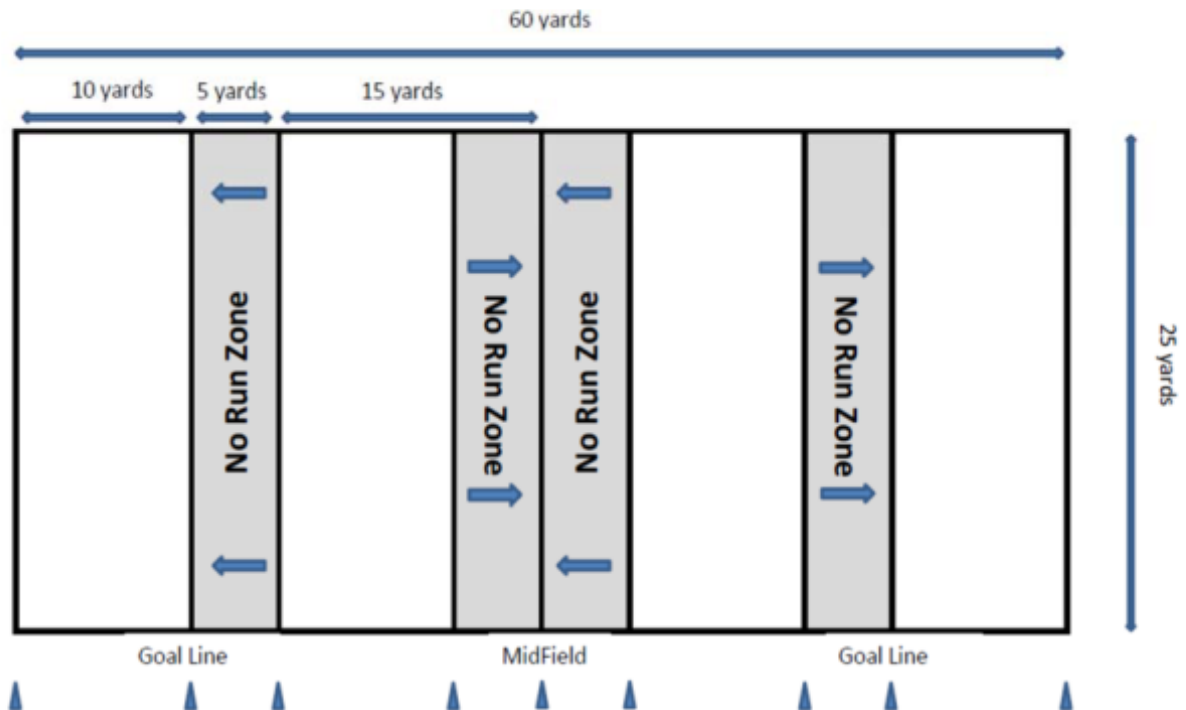
IV. Terminology

Player & Team Designation	
Center	Player who snaps the ball to the quarterback through their legs or to the side to begin play.
Defense	The team opposing the offense to prevent them from advancing the ball.
Offense	The team with possession of the ball.
Passer	The offensive player who throws the ball and may or may not be the quarterback.
Quarterback	The offensive player first receiving the snap and possession of the ball. The quarterback may not run the ball through the line of scrimmage.
Rusher	The defensive player assigned to rush the quarterback to prevent them from passing the ball.
Field Terms	
Downs	The offensive team has four (4) attempts or 'downs' to advance the ball. They must cross midfield to get another four (4) downs to score.
Line of Scrimmage	An imaginary line running through the forward point of the football and across the width of the field.
No Run Zones	Areas of the field where teams can only pass the ball.
Out of Bounds	The outer perimeter line of the field; including sidelines and end lines. A player is out of bounds when any part of the person is touching anything that is on or outside an end line or sideline.
Rush Line	An imaginary line running across the width of the field seven (7) yards from the line of scrimmage on the defensive side.
Ball Status	
Dead Ball	Refers to the period of time immediately before or after the play.
Live Ball	A live ball is a ball in play. A ball becomes live when the ball is legally snapped, and a down is in progress. 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.
Passing	
Backward Pass	A pass thrown with its initial direction parallel with or towards the goal line where the defense would score. Also known as a lateral pass or pitch.
Forward Pass	A pass thrown with its initial direction towards the goal line where the offense is trying to score.
Handoff	Transferring possession from one (1) teammate to another without throwing, tossing, or kicking. Only permitted behind the scrimmage.
Shovel Pass	A legal pass received beyond the line of scrimmage by throwing underhand or pushing it in a shot-put manner.
Playing Terms	
Defer	The winner of the coin toss gets the choice in the second half.
Flag Guarding	An act by the ball carrier to prevent a defender from pulling the ball carrier's flag by stiff arm, lowering elbow or head, or blocking access to the flags with a hand or arm.
Fumble	A loss of player possession other than by handoff or pass; immediately dead.
Inadvertent Whistle	Official's whistle blown in error.
Shift	A shift is simultaneous movement by two (2) or more offensive players before the snap.
Unsporting Conduct	A rude, confrontational, or offensive behavior or language.

V. The Field

- A. The playing field is sixty (60) yards long, including the end zones, and twenty-five (25) yards wide.
 - a. A space of at least five (5) yards around the field must be free and clear of obstructions.
 - b. The field can be marked with chalk, paint, and/or cones.
- B. **No run zones exist five (5) yards prior to the midfield line and endzone for the offense.**
 - a. When the line of scrimmage is within the no run zone, teams cannot run the ball.
 - i. Players may run the ball after receiving a pass.
 - b. Each offense team approaches only two (2) run zones in each drive:
 - i. Before midfield to gain the first down.
 - ii. Before the endzone to score a touchdown.
- C. **Stepping on a boundary line is considered out of bounds.**

Diagram of Special Olympics Flag Football Field



VI. Timing & Overtime

A. General Timing

- a. The game shall consist of two (2) halves with a running clock.
 - i. The event committee/tournament director shall determine the game length; traditionally 15-minute or 20-minute halves.
 1. There shall be a three (3) minute halftime for 15-minute halves, and a five (5) minute halftime for 20-minute halves.
 - ii. During the last minute of each half the clock:
 1. Stops for incomplete passes, scoring plays, changes of possession, out of bounds, or first downs.
 2. Restarts on the snap.
 3. Does not start for extra points.
- b. Each team receives one (1) 60-second timeout per half.
 - i. Any unused timeout does not carry over to the second half.
 - ii. The clock will stop for timeouts and restart on the snap.
- c. Officials can stop the clock at their discretion (injuries, etc.).
- d. Delay of game will be called if the ball is not put in play promptly and legally for any action or lack of action by either team that tends to prevent play.
 - i. Consuming more than 30-seconds to snap the ball after play is ready.
 - ii. Interrupting the 30-second count for any reason except a granted timeout.
 - iii. Failing to remove an injured player for whom the game clock was stopped for.
 - iv. Deliberately advancing the ball after it has been declared dead.

B. Overtime

- a. Overtime occurs if the score is tied at the end of regulation play.
- b. All regulation rules and penalties are in effect during overtime.
- c. There are no timeouts in overtime play.
- d. A coin toss is held to determine the first possession (called by the home team).
- e. Each team received two (2) downs beginning at mid-field to score or gain the most yards.
 - i. If the team with the first attempt in overtime scores on the first play, the opposing team must score on their first play also. There are no extra point attempts in overtime.
 - ii. If both teams score a touchdown, or gain the same yardage, the procedure is repeated until one (1) team wins.
 1. Teams will alternate possessions toward the same goal until there is a winner.
 2. The team that started the first overtime possession will possess the ball second in the next overtime.
 - iii. The team gaining the most points or yards is awarded one (1) extra point to the tied score and wins the game.
 - iv. Exceptions: the team that intercepts the pass automatically wins the game in overtime.

VII. Scoring

A. Touchdown

- a. A touchdown is worth six (6) points.

B. Extra Point

- a. One (1) point is from the 6-yard line.
- b. Two (2) points is from the 12-yard line.
- c. Penalty enforcement will change the spot of the attempt, not the point value of the attempt.

C. Safety

- a. Scored when the ball becomes dead in the defense's end zone.
- b. Worth two (2) points.

D. Mercy Rule

- a. If a team is up twenty-five (25) or more points, in the last minute of the game the clock will continue to run.

VIII. Coaches Expectations

- A. Coaches are expected to adhere to Special Olympics rules and philosophies, coach's guidelines, and codes of conduct at all times.
- B. Coaches shall remain seated or stand in the area immediately in front of their bench while the game is in progress.
 - a. Only two coaches are allowed on the team bench or in the team bench area.
- C. Coaches are given one conduct warning before dismissal from competition. Dismissal results in suspension from the remainder of the Games, and a review by Special Olympics Tennessee for further disciplinary action.

IX. Live Ball & Dead Ball

A. Live Ball

- a. A live ball is a ball in play. A ball becomes live when the ball is legally snapped, and a down is in progress. Generally used in regard to penalties, live ball penalties are considered part of the play and must be enforced before the down is considered complete.

B. Dead Ball

- a. Refers to the period of time immediately before or after a play.
- b. Play is dead when:
 - i. The ball carrier's flag is pulled.
 - ii. The ball carrier loses their flag.
 - iii. The ball carrier steps out of bounds.
 - iv. The ball carrier's knee, hand, or elbow touches the ground.
 - v. A touchdown, extra point, or safety is scored.
 - vi. When a forward pass strikes the ground.
 - vii. When a forward pass is caught simultaneously by opposing players (the offense retains possession).
 - viii. An offensive player without a flag catches the ball.
 - ix. A snapped ball touches the ground.
 - x. The ball is fumbled.
 - 1. If fumbled forward, the ball is spotted where the carrier's feet were at the time of the fumble.
 - 2. If fumbled backward, the ball is spotted where it hit the ground.
 - xi. When an inadvertent whistle is blown.

1. The team in possession of the ball may choose to accept the result of the play at the point where it was blown or replay the down.

X. Running the Ball

A. Running

- a. The quarterback cannot advance the ball across the line of scrimmage at any point during a down, even if a legal handoff has occurred. The quarterback is defined as the player who receives the snap.
- b. Ball carriers must make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position.
- c. Only direct handoffs behind the line of scrimmage are legal.
 - i. Direct handoffs may be forward, backward, or to the side of the quarterback but must occur behind the line of scrimmage.
 1. The ball must be transferred from one teammate to another without throwing, tossing, or kicking. This includes pitching.
 - ii. The offense may have unlimited handoffs until the ball crosses the line of scrimmage.
 1. The player who takes a handoff can pass the ball, as long as they do not cross the line of scrimmage.
 2. Any player other than the quarterback receiving a handoff is eligible to advance the ball beyond the line of scrimmage, unless snapped in a no run zone.
 3. For Unified: a handoff can occur between any combination of players behind the line of scrimmage.
 4. "Center Sneak" – The ball must completely leave the snapper's hands, and they must step back behind the line of scrimmage in order to receive the handoff before advancing the ball.
 - iii. The ball is marked at the spot where the forward point of the ball is when the player is declared down.
 - iv. The ball carrier may not dive, hurdle, stiff arm, or use either arm in an attempt to shield a defender from grasping their flag.
 1. Hurdling: Jumping over or attempting to jump over a player, by the ball carrier, to prevent from being downed or gain additional yardage, is illegal.
 - a. Jumping over a player who is on the ground, to avoid injury, is legal.
 2. Flag Guarding: Runners shall not shield, by using their hands, arms, or the ball, to deny the opportunity for an opponent to pull or remove the flag belt, including:
 - a. Swinging the hand or arm over the belt.
 - b. Stiff arms.
 - c. Placing the ball in a position over the flag belt.
 - d. Lowering the shoulders or arms over the flag belt.
 - e. Contact MUST occur for a flag guarding penalty to be called.

B. No Run Zone

- a. Located 5-yards before the mid-field line and the goal line for the offense.
 - i. Any ball snapped on or inside these zones must be passed.
 - ii. The purpose is to avoid short yardage, power running situations.
 - iii. If the line of scrimmage is broken by a runner, prior to being passed, it is an illegal procedure penalty.
 - iv. Penalties can move teams in and out of no run zones.

XI. Passing & Receiving

A. Passing and Receiving by the Offense

- a. All passes must be forward and received beyond the line of scrimmage.
 - i. Backward passes, including laterals or pitches, are illegal regardless of field position.
 - ii. Shovel passes are allowed.
- b. All players are eligible to receive a forward pass, even the quarterback following a legal handoff.
 - i. Unified Exception: If a partner throws a pass, only athletes are eligible receivers. No partner-to-partner passes.
 - a. Teams are expected to comply with this rule without intervention by officials. Failure to self-patrol will be considered un-sporting and will be penalized accordingly.
 - ii. If a player steps out of bounds, they may not be the first player to touch the ball.
- c. Only one (1) offensive player is allowed in motion, but they may not be moving toward the line of scrimmage at the snap.
- d. A player must have at least one (1) foot in bounds when making a catch.
- e. Interceptions may be returned. A ball intercepted in the end zone and downed is spotted at the 5-yard line. All other interceptions are marked down where the player who intercepted the ball is deemed down.

B. Diving

- a. A defensive or offensive player may dive to catch a pass.
- b. Diving is illegal when used to down a player or in an attempt to gain extra yards (personal foul).

XII. Rushing the Quarterback

- A. All defensive players who rush the quarterback must be a minimum of seven (7) yards from the line of scrimmage.
 - a. A special marker, disc or cone, placed by an official will designate the spot.
- B. Players not rushing the quarterback may defend the line of scrimmage.
- C. Once the quarterback hands off the ball, all defenders are eligible to rush.
- D. There is no limit to how many defenders may rush the quarterback.

XIII. Screen Blocking

- A. Screen blocking is defined as legally obstructing an opponent without using any part of the body to initiate contact. May not impede progress of a defensive player with contact.
- B. The screen blocker shall have their arms extended to the ground at the side, in front, or behind the back. Arms may also be crossed over the chest with hands near the shoulders.
- C. A player shall not hold, push, charge, trip, or impede the progress of an opponent by extending arms, elbows, shoulders, hips, knees, or by bending/leaning their body into other than a normal position.
- D. A player must be on their feet before, during, and after screen blocking.
- E. Screen blocking is the only form of legal blocking that can be used by any player.
 - a. Backfield Blocking (Behind the Line of Scrimmage)
 - i. If any of the provisions listed are violated, and contact results, the screener has committed an illegal block.
 - 1. The blocker must give an opponent at least one (1) step.
 - 2. The blocker must not initiate contact with an opponent.
 - 3. The blocker may not take a position so close to a moving opponent that this opponent cannot avoid contact by stopping or changing directions.
 - 4. After assuming a legal screen blocking position, a player may move to maintain it, unless they move into an opponent and create contact.
 - b. Downfield Blocking (Beyond the Line of Scrimmage)
 - i. A non-moving screen is the only acceptable form of downfield blocking.
 - ii. The blocker may not run between a defender and ball carrier in a manner that impedes a defender's progress to the flag.

XIV. Flag Pulling

- A. A legal flag pull takes place when the ball carrier is in full possession of the ball.
- B. A flag is considered pulled when the clip is no longer attached to the opposite side of the belt, even if it is still hanging on to the player.
- C. A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flag off a player who is not in possession of the ball.
- D. It is illegal to pull or strip the ball from the carrier's possession at any time.
- E. If a player's flag belt inadvertently falls off during a play, the player is down immediately upon possession of the ball and the play is dead.
- F. Defenders may not dive in an attempt to pull flags.
- G. The official may pull flag belts after a score, to show it was legally secured.

XV. Formations

- A. Line of Scrimmage
 - a. The line of scrimmage for each team is a vertical plane through the point of the ball nearest the team's goal line.
 - b. Each player on a team must be on their side of the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.
- B. Motion
 - a. Only one (1) offensive player may be in motion at the snap.
 - i. This player may not be moving toward the line of scrimmage at the snap.
 - ii. Before going into motion, this player must be set for one (1) second.
- C. Shift

- a. A shift occurs when more than one offensive player is in motion simultaneously prior to the snap.
 - i. Players must become set for one (1) second prior to the snap or going into motion.
 - ii. It is a penalty if the ball is snapped, and more than one (1) player is in motion.

D. The Snap

- a. The ball may be snapped between the center's legs or to their side.
 - i. The snapper's feet must be behind the line of scrimmage.
 - ii. The snapper shall transfer the ball from its position on the ground in a continuous motion to the quarterback to legally start the play.
 - iii. The snapper is the only player required on the line of scrimmage at the time of the snap.
- b. No offensive player may simulate the start of the play before the ball is snapped.

XVI. Unsporting Conduct

A. Unsporting Conduct/Rough Play

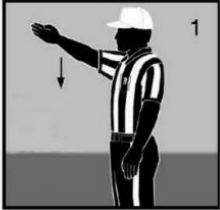
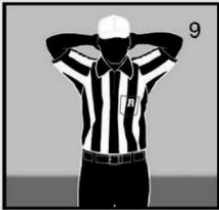
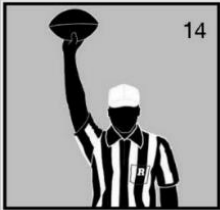
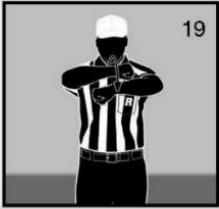
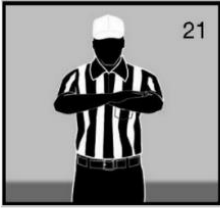
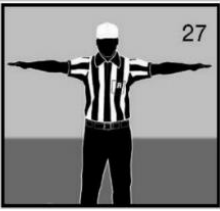
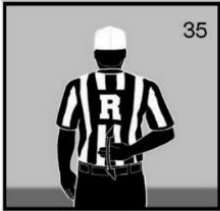
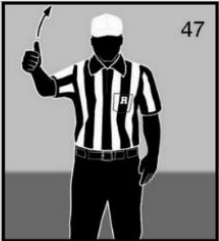
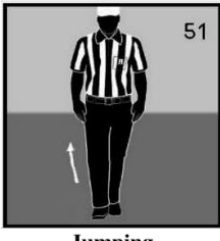
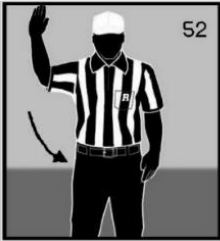
- a. The officials may disqualify a individual who participated in excessively rough or unsporting behavior, even if it is the individual's first unsporting conduct penalty.
- b. Tackling is a disqualification (tackles by grasping or encircling the hands or arms and taking an opponent to the ground).
- c. Dead ball fouls take place before or after a play has been called dead. They include:
 - i. Intentionally kicking the ball.
 - ii. Spiking the ball.
 - iii. Throwing the ball high into the air.
- d. Prohibited acts include attempting to influence the officials, disrespectfully addressing an official, indicating objections to an official's decision, being on the field illegally, intentionally contacting an official, leaving the sideline during a fight, refusal to comply or abide by an official's decision, using words similar to the other team's audibles, leaving the field between downs to gain an advantage, competing while wearing illegal equipment, use of profanity, taunting others, insulting or vulgar language or gestures.
- e. All unsporting conduct penalties are subject to review and further discipline by the event committee/tournament director.
 - i. Two (2) unsporting conduct penalties for an individual results in disqualification from the event, four (4) unsporting conduct penalties on a team results in disqualification from the event.

XVII. Penalties

- A. A coach or designated captain will have the opportunity to decline or accept the penalty based on the result of the play.
- B. All penalties are assessed from the line of scrimmage.
 - a. Penalties occurring after the dead ball will be assessed from the new line of scrimmage.
- C. No penalty may take the ball more than half the distance to the offender's goal line.

Offense Pre-Snap Penalties (Five yards from the line of scrimmage & replay down)	
Delay of Game	Failing to snap within 30-seconds of ready to play whistle.
Illegal Motion	Moving forward at the snap; snap not in one (1) motion.
Illegal Shift	More than one (1) player moving at the snap.
Offsides	Beyond the line of scrimmage at the snap; false start.
Offense Post-Snap Penalties (Five yards from the line of scrimmage & loss of down)	
Flag Guarding	Shielding a flag.
Illegal Contact	Setting a pick, holding, illegal blocking, bumping, stiff arming.
Illegal Pass (Backward)	All backward passes/pitches regardless of field location.
Illegal Pass (Forward)	Pass not completed beyond line of scrimmage; passer's foot if beyond the line of scrimmage; two (2) forward passes in a down; intentionally grounding the ball; Unified partner-to-partner pass.
Illegal Procedure	Quarterback run; handoff beyond the line of scrimmage; diving; hurdling.
Pass Interference	Contact that interferes with a receiver.
Unsporting Conduct Offense (Ten yards from the line of scrimmage & loss of down)	
Unsportsmanlike Conduct	Poor behavior.
Defensive Pre-Snap Penalties (Five yards from the line of scrimmage & replay down)	
Offsides	Beyond the line of scrimmage at the snap.
Defensive Post-Snap Penalties (Five yards from the line of scrimmage & automatic first down)	
Illegal Contact	Holding, blocking, bumping, stripping the ball, roughing the passer.
Illegal Procedure	Rushing the quarterback inside seven (7) yards; illegal flag pull; diving in an attempt to pull the flag.
Pass Interference	Contact that interferes with a receiver.
Unsporting Conduct Defense (Ten yards from the line of scrimmage & automatic first down)	
Unsportsmanlike Conduct	Poor behavior.

XVIII. Officials Motions

S 1  Ready for play	S 3  Stop the clock	S 5  Touchdown	S 6  Safety
S 8  First Down	S 9  Loss of down	S 10  Incomplete pass	S 14  End of period
S 18  Offside Defense Illegal Blitz	S 19  False start Illegal procedure	S 21  Delay of game Delay of pass	S 22  Illegal participation Illegal substitution
S 27  Unsportsmanlike conduct	S 33  Pass Interference	S 35  Illegal forward pass Illegal backward pass	S 38  Illegal contact
S 43  Illegal block	S 47  Disqualification	S 51  Jumping Diving	S 52  Flag guarding Illegal Flag pull