

2025 Flag Football

Fall Season Statewide Coaches Call

Special Olympics
Washington



Agenda



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Welcome



Welcome Tyler Bjork

***Special
Olympics***
Washington



50  **YEARS**
1975 - 2025



Region Leadership Contacts

East Region: Webpage: click [HERE](#)

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Tim Toon – ttoon@sowa.org

Northwest Region: Webpage: click [HERE](#)

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Welcome



Meeting Goals

- Review major 2024 Flag Football rule changes and their impact
- Clarify competition format, attire, and Unified Sports requirements
- Equip coaches with best practices for training athletes
- Highlight volunteer needs and safety responsibilities
- Point coaches to key training resources (rules, SONA, Learn portal)

2025 Sports & Competition Updates



Fall Games

- No Fall State Games in 2025
- Flag football offered at regional level.

New Age Category:

- Addition of **30+ age group** to foster more competitive opportunities.
- Age groups may still be combined if participation numbers are too low.

Athlete Hospitality Update:

- As a continuation of Winter 2025 Events, **full meals will not be provided at events.**
- Athletes should bring their own meals.
- Light snacks such as power bars, chips, fruit, and drinks will be available

2025 Sports & Competition Updates



2025 Competition Overview:

Go to your region webpage to find your regional **competition dates and information**:



NORTHWEST – Click [HERE](#)

SOUTHWEST – Click [HERE](#)

EAST – Click [HERE](#)

2025 FALL STATE GAMES: There is no Fall Games in 2025. In 2026 we will continue to host Winter and Spring Games.

Final Registration and BSAT / Score Submissions



FINAL REGISTRATION / COMPETITION ROSTER FORM:

Check your region webpage or contact Program/Sports Manager to **confirm FINAL REGISTRATION / COMPETITION ROSTER DUE DATE.**

Complete **pecially generated FINAL REGISTRATION form** to submit in the Smartsheet Portal. Includes **participants / team names / scores.** ALL participants must be included – there will be an audit period to adjust “sport specific” information (Scores – Team Name – Everyone in correct event).

EVENTS OFFERED

- Individual Skills Competition
- Special Olympics Team Competition
- Unified Sports Team Competition

TEAM NAMES

- All bowling team entries must be identified by a team name. A team name shall only be used once.
 - **IDENTIFIER (Location) + NAME**
 - Example: **Goldendale Timberwolves**

Coaching Guide: General Best Practices



Athlete Centered Coaching

Progressions, repetition, positive reinforcement

Safety First

Warm-up & cooldown every practice

Hydration plan; footwear; lane etiquette

Know medical & risk management basics

Inclusive Coaching

Adapt equipment (ball weight, ramp height)

Visual & tactile cues

Pairing & peer modeling

Communication

Short, concrete cues; one focus at a time

Use demos and target markers on lanes

Behavior Support

Predictable routines reduce anxiety

Choice within drills (ball, target)

Practice Flow

Minimize wait time; small groups; stations



Coaching Guide: General Best Practices

Coaching with Positive Reinforcement

Why it matters

- Athletes learn faster when told what *to do* instead of what *not to do*.
- Positive reinforcement builds confidence, motivation, and retention.
- Negative phrasing (“don’t drop your hands”) can reinforce the very mistake you want to avoid.

Say what you want to see.

- ✗ “Don’t grab jerseys” → ✓ “Pull the flag at the hips.”
- ✗ “Don’t run sideways” → ✓ “Drive forward toward the end zone.”

Keep cues short & specific.

“Eyes up,” “Quick feet,” “Strong throw.”

Reinforce effort, not just outcome.

Praise hustle, positioning, or focus—not only touchdowns.

Coaching Guide: General Best Practices



Coaching with Positive Reinforcement

Use consistent “do” language.

Creates predictable coaching patterns athletes can repeat.

Immediate praise works best.

Recognize effort right after the play (“Great effort keeping your flags visible!”).

Examples in Flag Football

- ✗ “Don’t stand flat-footed” → ✓ “Stay light on your toes.”
- ✗ “Don’t throw off balance” → ✓ “Set your feet before you throw.”
- ✗ “Don’t forget your mouthguard” → ✓ “Check your gear before the huddle.”



Coaching Guide: General Best Practices

Respect for the Game - Sportsmanship

Respect and Safety First

- Play under control – no tackling, pushing, or rough contact.
- Keep flags visible at all times (shirts tucked in, no flag guarding).
- Stop immediately when the whistle blows.

Sportsmanship

- Celebrate effort, teamwork, and improvement — not just touchdowns.
- Encourage teammates and respect opponents.
- No taunting, trash talk, or negative gestures.

Game Flow

- Be ready for the snap; keep the pace moving.
- Respect officials' calls — only coaches may question rulings.
- Sub in and out quickly to keep everyone involved.

Shared Space

- Stay on your sideline unless you're in the game.
- Coaches & players remain outside the field of play between downs.
- Respect volunteers and officials giving instructions.

Coaching Guide: General Best Practices



Framework for Inclusive Coaching

Empower Athlete Leadership

- Create **team captains** to model sportsmanship, encourage teammates, and communicate with officials.
- Rotate captain roles so multiple athletes experience leadership.
- Give athletes the responsibility of leading stretches, team cheers, or pre-game coin toss participation.

Use Leaders on the Field

- Assign experienced athletes to guide **warm-ups, huddles, and substitutions**.
- Peer leaders can help manage lineups, remind teammates of positioning, and reinforce etiquette (e.g., respect officials, keep flags visible).
- Use “field captains” to call out plays or defensive formations alongside the coach.

Promote Shared Responsibility

- Athletes help with **equipment setup** (flags, cones, footballs).
- Rotate players into roles like **hydration captain** or **practice station leader**.
- Encourage athletes to cheer and support teammates, not just when scoring.
- Ensure **all athletes contribute** — no one dominates, everyone has meaningful involvement.

Coaching Guide: General Best Practices



5–10 min: Arrival & Dynamic Warm-up

Jog, high knees, butt kicks, side shuffles.

Arm circles, trunk twists, hip and ankle mobility.

Quick safety check: flags secure, mouthguards in, cleats tied.

10–15 min: Fundamentals (Skills Focus)

Stance & Alignment: ready position, knees bent, eyes up.

Flag Pulling: short chases, pull-and-drop drill.

Ball Handling: grip, secure hold at the waist, quick handoffs.

20–30 min: Skill Stations *(3–4 rotating groups, 5–6 min each)*

Passing & Catching: QB short throws; receivers run slant & out routes.

Defense: flag-pull pursuit angles; backpedal into coverage.

Route Running: cones set for slant, curl, and go routes.

Game Awareness: no-run zone drill (snap → must pass across LOS).

10–15 min: Team Concepts

5v5 walk-through of basic plays (slant, quick out, center pass).

Defensive alignment practice (man-to-man coverage).

Simulate game timing — huddles, snap count, substitutions.

5–10 min: Cooldown

Static stretches (hamstrings, quads, shoulders).

Team circle: highlight 1 success + 1 area to focus on next practice.

2–5 min: Cleanup & Check-out

Equipment gathered (flags, cones, balls).

Hydration check.

Assign “homework”: e.g., 10 flag pulls with a sibling, 20 catches at home



Rules & Competition Updates

Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Flag Football govern all competitions.

General Resources can be found here:

General Rules

- [Flag Football Sports Rules \(2024\)](#)
- [Flag Football Rule Change Summary \(2024\)](#)

Coaches Resources

- [Flag Football – SONA Sports Resource Page](#)
- [SONA – Flag Football Coaches Training \(.ppt\)](#)

Required Sport Forms

- [Flag Football_BSAT_Team Entry and Rating Form](#)
- [Flag Football_BSAT_Individual Rating Form](#)
- [Flag Football_Individual Skills_Competition Overview](#)
- [Flag Football_Individual Skills_Score Sheet](#)

Rules & Competition Updates



Competition Format

- 5v5 play (Traditional or Unified).
- 2 × 20-minute halves (running clock, last minute = stop clock).
- 4 downs to cross midfield → 4 downs to score.
- All drives start at the team's own 5-yard line (except interception returns).
- Coin toss determines possession; winner can defer.



Rules & Competition Updates

Competition Attire & Equipment

▶ **Uniforms:**

- ▶ Shirts uniform in color/style, numbered front & back, tucked in.
- ▶ Shorts/pants = no pockets, must contrast flag color.

▶ **Flags:** Specific Requirements for each region

- ▶ **Ball:** Teams shall play with a pebble-grained leather or rubber covered ball in regular or intermediate/youth football sizes.
- ▶ **Required:** Mouthpiece, Flag Belts (Both Offense & Defense)
- ▶ **Prohibited:** Jewelry, metal cleats, hats with hard bills.

Rules based on safety are **NON NEGOTIABLE!**

Rules & Competition Updates



Competition Attire & Equipment

▶ Flag Belt Requirements

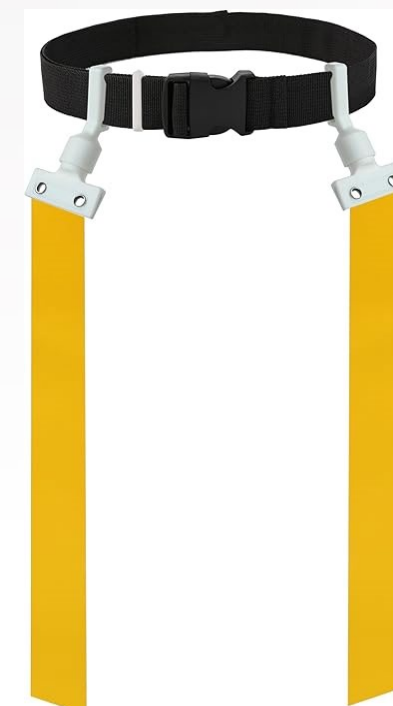
Northwest / Southwest	East
3 Flag Quick Release	2 Flag Pop Out
Where to Purchase: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Amazon• BSN Sports• Epic Sports	Where to Purchase: Amazon



NW / SW REGION



EAST REGION



Rules & Competition Updates



Points of Emphasis

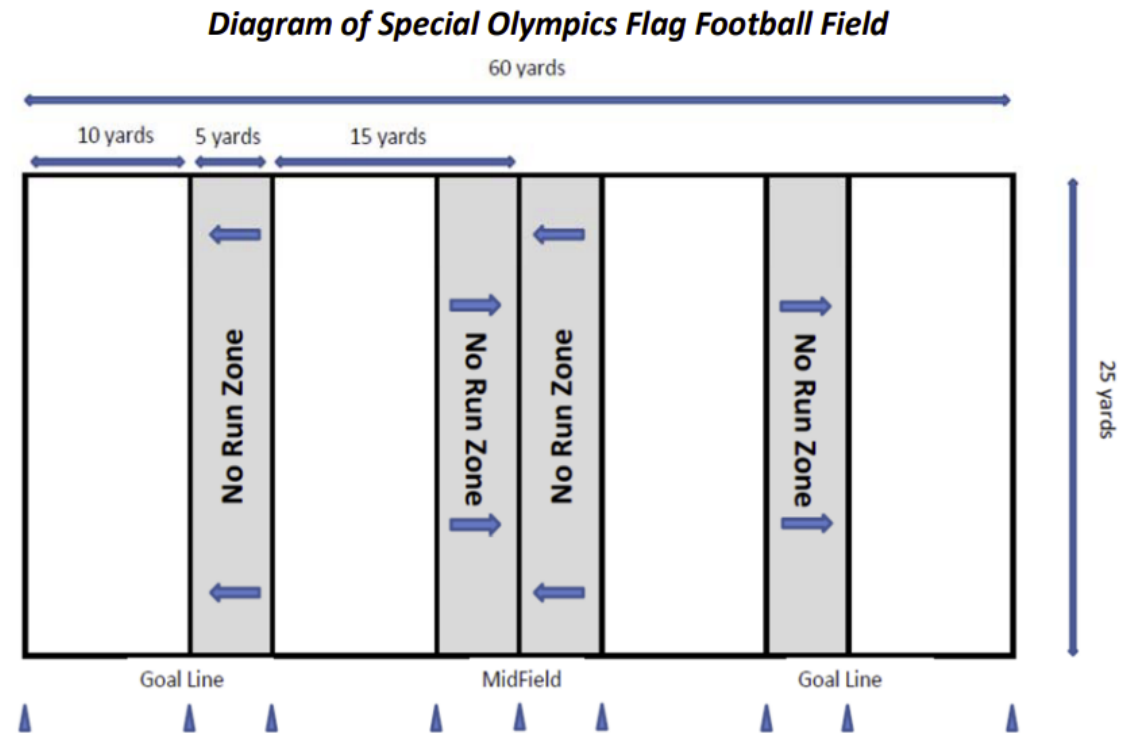
- ▶ QB **cannot** run across line of scrimmage.
- ▶ No tackling, hurdling, stiff arm, flag guarding, or diving for yards.
- ▶ Only **one offensive player** in motion, not toward LOS.
- ▶ **No Run Zones** (5 yds before midfield & goal line): must pass.
- ▶ Forward progress = marked at **forward point of the ball**, not player's body.

Rules & Competition Updates



Field of Play

- ▶ Field = 60 yds long × 25 yds wide (5 yd end zones).
- ▶ 5-yard safety buffer around the field.
- ▶ Clearly marked no-run zones.



Rules & Competition Updates



Unified Sports®

- ▶ Lineup: max **3 athletes + 2 partners**.
- ▶ Partners may **not pass to partners**.
- ▶ Handoffs allowed between any combo (athlete ↔ partner).
- ▶ Teams must follow *Meaningful Involvement* principle — every player contributes.



Rules & Competition Updates

Uniform Requirements

Old Rule:

- Entire uniform (shirt + shorts/pants) had to match in color/style.
- Shorts/pants could be same color as flags.

New Rule (2024):

- Only shirts must be uniform in color/style.
- Shorts/pants must be **contrasting color** from flags.

Why it Matters:

- Easier for programs to find affordable shorts/pants.
- Improves visibility for defenders and officials to pull flags.



Rules & Competition Updates

Timeouts

Old Rule:

- Two timeouts per game.
- One unused timeout from first half could carry over.

New Rule (2024):

- Still two timeouts per game.
- **No carryover** — all must be used in the half they are earned.

Why it Matters:

- Forces coaches to manage timeouts strategically.
- Creates consistency with NFL Flag & NIRSA formats.

Rules & Competition Updates



Ball Carrier Touching Ground

Old Rule:

- If **any body part other than feet** touched the ground, the play was dead.

New Rule (2024):

- The **hand** may now touch the ground without ending the play.
- The ball is considered an extension of the hand when in possession.

Why it Matters:

- Allows athletes to regain balance with a hand.
- Prevents unnecessary stoppages.
- Aligns Special Olympics with NFL Flag, IFAF, and USA Football.

Rules & Competition Updates



Interceptions Returned for Yards

Old Rule:

- Interceptions resulted in immediate possession change at spot, **no return allowed**.
- Defensive players not required to wear flag belts.

New Rule (2024):

- Interceptions may now be **returned for positive yards**.
- Defensive players must wear flag belts.

Why it Matters:

- Adds excitement & strategy — defense can score.
- Increases athlete engagement on both sides of the ball.
- Aligns with all major flag football bodies (NFL, IFAF, NIRSA).

Rules & Competition Updates



Defensive Rusher Reset

Old Rule:

- A rusher who crossed the 7-yard rush line early was **immediately offsides** and could not rush.

New Rule (2024):

- A rusher may retreat, reset at the 7-yard mark, and then legally rush.

Why it Matters:

- Protects defensive players on hard counts.
- Reduces unnecessary penalties.
- Brings SOWA rules in line with USA Football.

Rules & Competition Updates



Defensive Delay of Game

Old Rule:

- Delay of game applied only to the offense.

New Rule (2024):

- Defense can now be penalized for delay of game (e.g., disconcerting signals, illegal actions that stall play).

Why it Matters:

- Ensures fairness for both offense and defense.
- Gives officials a tool to prevent stalling tactics.

Volunteer: Calls to Action



We invite you to join us this season via the following calls to action:

- **Volunteer at an event on your own, with your family, or with your co-workers** (detailed fall event schedule attached or can find [here](#))
- **Volunteer to help prepare for an event** (office prep event schedule [here](#))
- **Learn more about how you get involved beyond a day-of opportunity** (peruse potential roles [here](#) or winter-specific needs [here](#))
- **Spread the word on how to get involved or attend an event/cheer on our athletes this season** (flyers here)



Volunteer: How to Register

Step 1: Create a profile via <https://portals.specialolympics.org>

- Note: Your email activation code will be sent from “**Microsoft on behalf of Special Olympics B2C Production.**” Please be sure to check your spam folder as well.

Step 2: Navigate to shift of choice and click "Register"

****Only system exception is for our certified first aid/medical volunteers who have a separate vetting/registration process: <https://emgwa.org/so-signup/>**

Volunteer: Fall Event Opportunities (ALL)



- ☐ Sat., October 11 – Bowling, East sub-regionals (PULLMAN) [View Schedule Here](#)
- ☐ Sun., October 12 – Bowling, East sub-regionals (MOSES LAKE) [View Schedule Here](#)
- ☐ Sat., October 18 – Powerlifting, NW & SW regionals (AUBURN) **Coming Soon!**
- ☐ Sun., October 19 – Bowling, SW sub-regionals (VANCOUVER) [View Schedule Here](#)
- ☐ Sun., October 19 – Bowling, East sub-regionals (TRI-CITIES) [View Schedule Here](#)
- ☐ Sat., October 25 – Bowling, NW sub-regionals (LYNNWOOD) [View Schedule Here](#)
- ☐ Sat., October 25 – Bowling, SW Youth sub-regionals (LAKEWOOD) [View Schedule Here](#)
- ☐ Sat., October 25 – Bowling, SW sub-regionals Day 1 (TACOMA) [View Schedule Here](#)
- ☐ Sun., October 26 – Bowling, SW sub-regionals Day 2 (TACOMA) [View Schedule Here](#)
- ☐ Sun., October 26 – Bowling, East sub-regionals (SPOKANE) [View Schedule Here](#)
- ☐ Sat., November 1 – Bowling, NW sub-regionals (KENMORE) [View Schedule Here](#)
- ☐ Sat., November 1 – Bowling, SW sub-regionals (SILVERDALE) [View Schedule Here](#)
- ☐ Sun., November 2 – Bowling, NW sub-regionals (BELLINGHAM) [View Schedule Here](#)
- ☐ Sun., November 2 – Bowling, NW sub-regionals (FEDERAL WAY) [View Schedule Here](#)
- ☐ Sun., November 2 – Flag Football, East regionals (TRI-CITIES) [View Schedule Here](#)
- ☐ Sat., November 8 – Flag Football, NW & SW regionals (TUKWILA) [View Schedule Here](#)
- ☐ Sun., November 9 – Bowling, East regionals (TRI-CITIES) [View Schedule Here](#)
- ☐ Sun., November 9 – Bowling, SW regionals (SILVERDALE) [View Schedule Here](#)
- ☐ Sat., November 15 – Bowling, NW regionals (KENMORE) [View Schedule Here](#)
- ☐ Sun., November 16 – Unified Robotics Championships (RENTON) **Coming Soon!**

Coaches & Program Coordinators Responsibilities



- **Code of Conduct:**

- Educate athletes & families on the code of conduct.
- Address and report violations promptly.

- **Incident Reports:**

- Required for injuries, altercations, or policy violations.
- Submit within **24-48 hours** to regional staff.

- **Crisis Communication:**

- Escalate major incidents to SOWA leadership.
- Follow official media response protocol (direct inquiries to VP of Communications).

General Policies



Code of Conduct

Athlete, Coaches, and Spectators Code of Conduct has been included in the Winter Season Coaches Packet, SOWA Website, and can be found here:

[Athlete & Unified Partner Code of Conduct \(Link\)](#)

[Family Code of Conduct \(Link\)](#)

[Coaches Code of Conduct \(Link\)](#)

[Spectator Code of Conduct \(Link\)](#)

[Code of Conduct Violation Report \(Link\)](#)

General Policies



Code of Conduct – General Reminders

- Abide by the rules and policies of Special Olympics Washington.
- Exhibit good sportsmanship and act as role models for Special Olympics Washington.
- Refrain from and prohibit physical and verbal abuse, profanity and other inappropriate behavior.
- Refrain from and prohibit the use of alcohol, illegal drugs, and controlled substances. **(No smoking/tobacco use in restricted areas.)**
- Guarantee supervision of athletes.
- Refrain from illegal activities (felonies and misdemeanors), including the possession of harmful weapons.

Coaches must share these policies with their programs, including Athletes, Coaches, Chaperones, and Parents / Spectators

General Policies



General SOWA Safety Policies

All policies below are strictly enforced for the safety of everyone on site:

- **Smoking Policy:** Smoking is not allowed at ANY Special Olympics Washington event or competition area. There is absolutely NO smoking at the opening ceremony, or the Victory Dinner/Dance.
- **Service Animal Policy:** Only service animals are allowed at Special Olympics Washington practices, competitions and/or special events for safety reasons.
- **Drugs & Alcohol:** No use of alcohol, illegal drugs, and controlled substances. *from the Games.*

General Policies



Incident Report

To be covered, the injury must occur while: (a) participating in activities that are authorized, organized and supervised by Special Olympics; or (b) traveling to, during, or after such activities as a member of a group in transportation furnished or arranged by Special Olympics. Covered Event is defined as any scheduled activity authorized, organized and supervised by Special Olympics. With respect to competition activities, this includes pre-competition activities and practice sessions.

- ☐ Complete Incident Report Form
- ☐ Once complete, the form must be signed by all applicable parties, including any witnesses and Special Olympics Washington Staff, if applicable. The Program Coordinator should send this to their Regional Program Manager.
- ☐ Once fully completed and signed, the Incident Report will then be filed in by Special Olympics Washington Staff.
- ☐ Once a medical bill is received by the injured party (after they have submitted through their own insurance. This would be any costs after the fact.), submit the completed incident report form and the medical bill to Special Olympics Washington Staff

Thank you



Questions?