

Uniform Specifications

All participants must have a playing uniform consisting of matching shirts or pennies with numbers on the back which can be tucked in at the waist. No jewelry may be worn (rings, bracelets, necklaces, earrings, etc.). No jeans will be allowed. Players must wear rubber-cleated or flat-soled athletic shoes. Metal cleats, spikes, hiking boots or other equipment deemed dangerous by officials will not be allowed.

Equipment

1. An intermediate (youth) size football will be used in all divisions.
2. A protective mouthpiece must be worn at all times.
3. A one piece three flag belt will be worn during the game.

Points of Emphasis

1. No team shall repeatedly commit fouls which halve the distance to the goal line.
2. Neither team shall commit any act which, in the opinion of the referee, tends to make a travesty of the game. This includes intentionally committing fouls to gain an advantage.
3. The referee will enforce any penalty he/she considers equitable, including the award of a score for an unfair act.

General Rules

1. Special Olympics Flag Football is non-contact. In all aspects of Special Olympics Flag Football, rulings shall be made with player safety as the primary consideration.
2. The team roster may contain a maximum of 10 players.
3. Teams must field a minimum of four (4) players at all times but no more than five on the field of play.
4. All players must have equal playing time.
5. Teams will be grouped in divisions based on a classification round of games.
6. Unified ratio must be 3:2.

Scoring:

1. Touchdown: 6 points
2. Extra Point: 1 point (from the 5 yard line), 2 points (from the 10 yard line) Note: 1 point PAT is pass only; 2 point PAT can be run or pass.
3. Safety: 2 points
4. No Kicking

Timing:

1. The game shall consist of two 20-minute halves (running time). The last minute of the second half the clock will stop for normal football game stoppages. Clock starts on whistle after penalties and a first down. Officials can stop the clock at their discretion (injuries, delays).
2. Each team receives one 60 second time-out per half. An unused time-out in the first half does not carry over to the second half. Only the Captain or Coach can call the times outs.
3. There shall be a 5-minute break at halftime.

Coin Toss:

1. A coin toss determines first possession.
2. Each team will provide two captains.
3. The officials and team captains will meet 3 minutes prior to the start of the contest to conduct the coin toss.
4. The winner of the coin toss will choose offense, defense or end of field to defend. The team winning the coin toss may defer its choice to the second half.

Possessions:

1. All possessions, except following an interception, start at the offensive team's 5-yard line.
2. The offense has 4 plays to cross mid-field.
3. Once the offense crosses mid-field, they have 4 additional plays to score a touchdown.
4. If the offensive team fails to cross mid-field or score a touchdown in the prescribed number of plays, possession of the ball changes and the opposite team starts at their 5-yard line.
5. Interceptions change possession of the ball at the spot of the end of the return. A ball intercepted in the end zone is spotted at the 5 yard line if not returned out of the end zone.
6. Each time the ball is spotted (marked ready for play by the official) the team has 30 seconds to snap the ball.

Positions / Snap:

1. The Ball can be snapped between the legs, picked up and tossed to the QB, or side snapped to the QB.
2. No minimum number of players is required to line up on the line of scrimmage.

Rushing The QB:

1. All players that rush the quarterback must be a minimum of 7 yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped. A special marker, placed by the official, will designate the spot 5 yards from the line of scrimmage.
2. Players not rushing the quarterback may defend the line of scrimmage.
3. Once the quarterback hands off the ball, the 7-yard zone no longer exists, and all defenders are eligible to rush.

Running:

1. The Quarterback (player receiving the snap) CANNOT run the ball.
2. Only direct hand-offs behind the line of scrimmage are legal. Laterals and pitches are not allowed.
3. Unified partners are eligible to receive a direct hand-off from the quarterback.
4. The player who takes a hand-off can pass the ball, as long as he/she does not pass the line of scrimmage.
5. "No Running Zones" are located 5 yards before the mid-field line and goal line. Any ball snapped from these zones must be passed. The purpose of "No Running Zones" is to avoid short yardage power running situations.
6. Spinning is allowed, but players cannot leave their feet to avoid a flag pull.
7. The ball is spotted where the ball is when the flag is pulled.

Passing And Receiving:

1. All passes must be forward and received beyond the line of scrimmage.
2. All players are eligible to receive a forward pass, including the quarterback if he/she has legally handed-off. **Exception:** In Unified Sports® divisions, if a Partner throws a pass, only Athletes are eligible receivers. Partners can't throw to each other. Athletes can throw to partners and athletes.
3. Only one player is allowed in motion at the snap and he/she may not be moving toward the line of scrimmage at the snap.
4. A player must have at least one foot in bounds when making a catch.
5. Interceptions can be returned and possession will start at the end of the return. (Exception: A ball intercepted in the end zone and not returned is spotted at the 5-yard line).

Dead Balls / Fumbles:

1. There are no fumbles. The ball is spotted where it hits the ground.
2. Play is ruled dead when:
 - the ball carrier's flag is pulled
 - the ball carrier loses his/her flag and then is touched by one hand below the neck. the ball carrier steps out of bounds
 - the ball carrier's knee or arm touches the ground
 - a touchdown, extra point, or safety is scored

- when during a try-for-point the defense obtains possession of the ball
- when a forward pass strikes the ground or is caught simultaneously by opposing players (the offensive retains possession)
- a snapped ball touches the ground when there is an inadvertent whistle

Overtime: If the score is tied at the end of regulation play:

a. If the score is tied at the end of regulation play:

- i. A coin toss is held to determine first possession.
- ii. Each team receives two (2) plays from midfield and the team gaining the most points or gaining a yardage advantage is awarded one (1) extra point and wins the game.

Exceptions to this rule are as follows:

- 1) Interception: The team that intercepts the pass automatically wins the game.
- 2) If the team with the first attempt in overtime scores on the first play, the opposing team must score on its first play also.
- 3) If both teams score a touchdown, or gain the same yardage, the procedure is repeated until one (1) team wins.

Unified Sports® Teams

1. The roster shall contain a proportionate number of Athletes and Partners.
2. During competition, the line-up shall never exceed 3 Athletes and 2 Partners at any time. Failure to adhere to the required ratio results in a forfeit.
3. Each team shall have an adult non-playing coach responsible for the line-up and conduct of the team during competition.
4. If a four person team, must have at least two partners and two athletes.

Supplement to the Rules

1. **Delay of the Game:** The ball must be put in play promptly and legally and any action or lack of action by either team that tends to prevent this is considered a delay of the game. This includes:
 - Interrupting the 30-second count for any reason except for a granted time-out. Consuming more than 30 seconds to snap the ball after it is ready for play.
 - Failing to remove an injured player for whose benefit an excess time-out has been granted.
 - Deliberately advancing the ball after it has been declared dead.
2. **Diving:** a defensive or offensive player may dive to catch a pass, however, diving is illegal when used to down a player or advance a ball. A player cannot dive in an attempt to gain extra yardage. The team will be penalized accordingly.
3. **Eligible Receiver:** All offensive players are eligible to receive a pass, except in Unified Sports® divisions where Partners are ineligible when Partners are throwing the pass. Unified Sports® teams are expected to comply with this rule without intervention by officials. Failure to “self- patrol” will be considered unsportsmanlike, and will be penalized accordingly.
4. **False Start:** No member of the offensive team may simulate the start of the play before the ball is snapped.
5. **Handing the Ball:** Handing the ball is transferring player possession from one teammate to another without throwing or kicking it. A ball carrier may hand the ball backward at any time. No forward hand-offs are allowed. (Illegal pass)
6. **Hurdling:** Jumping over or attempting to jump over a player, by the ball carrier, to prevent from being downed or to gain additional yardage is illegal. (Note: Jumping over a player who is on the ground to avoid injury, by official’s judgment, is legal.)
7. **Inadvertent Whistle:** In case of an inadvertent whistle the team in possession of the ball may choose to accept the result of the play at the point where the play was blown dead or choose to re- \ play the down.
8. **Line of Scrimmage:** The line of scrimmage for each team is a vertical plane through the point of the ball nearest the team’s goal line. Each player on a team must be on its side of the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.
9. **Motion:** Only one player of the offensive team may be in motion at the snap. This player must be behind the

quarterback and not moving toward its goal line at the time the ball is snapped. If the player comes to a stop he/she must be set for one second.

- 10. Screen Blocking:** Legally obstructing an opponent without contacting him/her with any part of the screen blocker's body. The screen blocker shall have his/her arms fully extended to the ground (below the waist) either at his/her side, in front, or behind his/her back. Any use of arms, elbows, or legs to initiate contact during the screen block is illegal. A player must be on his/her feet before, during and after screen blocking. Screen blocking is the only form of legal blocking that can be used by any player at any time.
- The screen blocker must give an opponent at least one step if opponent has his/her back to blocker. The screen blocker must not initiate contact with opponent.
 - The screen blocker may not take a position so close to a moving opponent that this opponent cannot avoid contact by stopping or changing directions.
 - After a screen blocker has taken his/her legal screening position, the blocker may move laterally or backward to maintain the block.
 - Offensive players must stop their motion once the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage. No running with the ball carrier.

Note: If any of the above provisions are violated, and contact results, the screener has committed an illegal block.

- 11. Shielding (Flag Guarding):** Runners shall not flag guard by using their hands, arms, or the ball to deny the opportunity for opponent to pull or remove their flag belt. This includes:
- Swinging the hand or arm over the flag belt
 - Placing the ball in possession over the flag belt
 - Lowering the shoulders or arm over the flag belt
- 12. Shift:** A shift is the action of one or more offensive players who after taking set positions move to a new position prior to the snap. A player who shifts must reset for one second prior to the snap.
- 13. Snap:** A snap is the legal act of passing the ball from the ground to the quarterback to start a play. The ball can be snapped between the legs, picked up and tossed to the QB, or side snapped to the QB.
- 14. Substitution:** Any player on the roster may enter upon the completion of a play (when the ball is dead). Each substitute must play at least one down prior to being replaced. A replaced player must leave the field immediately.

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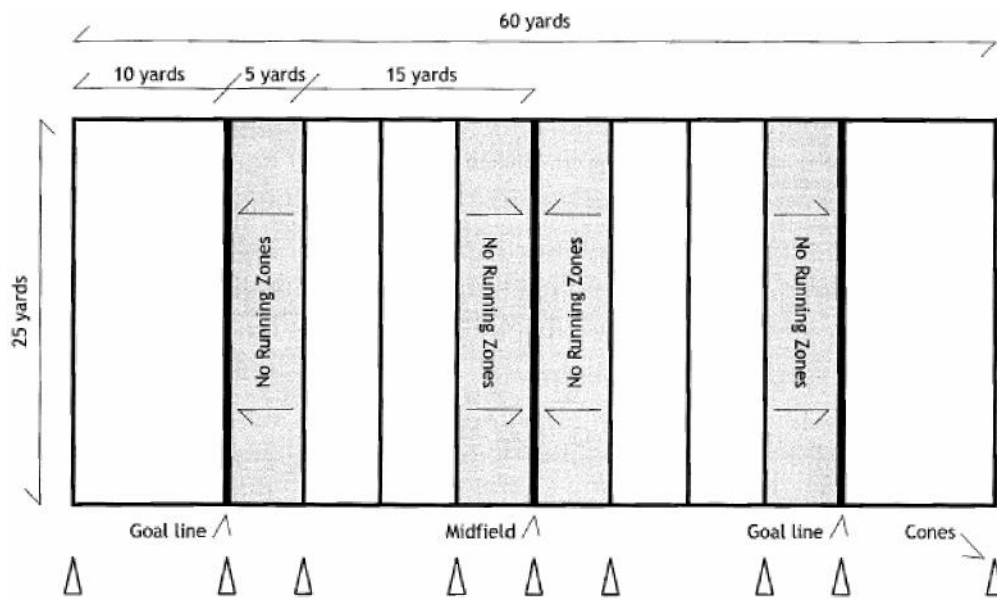
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Diagram of Flag Football Field



Officials

Special Olympics Flag Football is officiated by 3 qualified officials (Referee and Linesman) who are assisted by a scorekeeper.

Primary duties of the Referee:

1. Pre-game meeting and coin toss
2. Spotting the ball (including placing the ball marker on the ground)
3. Ready for play / delay of game
4. Offensive team's pre-snap compliance with the rules
5. Runs to the line of scrimmage
6. Side of field opposite Linesman
7. General rules enforcement
8. Penalties

Primary duties of the Linesman:

1. Official timer
2. Number of down
3. Ball marker 5 yards from line of scrimmage
4. "No running zones"
5. Defensive team's rules compliance (including pass rush violations)
6. Forward progress on runs or passes beyond line of scrimmage
7. Side of field opposite Referee
8. General rules enforcement



Clarifications on the Rules:

Snapping the Ball: (actual rule)

The ball can be snapped between the legs, picked up and tossed to QB, or side snapped to the QB.

When a player loses his/her flag: (actual rule)

The Play will be ruled dead when the ball carrier loses his/her flag and then is touched by one hand below the neck

Interceptions: (actual rule)

Interceptions can be returned and possession will start at the end of the return (Exception: A ball intercepted in the end zone and not returned is spotted at the 5 yard line)

Spinning: (actual rule)

Athletes can spin to avoid having their flag pulled. But they cannot have their feet leave the ground.

Rushing the QB: (actual rule)

Athletes rushing the quarter back must be 7 yards from the line of scrimmage.

Tips for Refing at Special Olympics:

- Be consistent as possible; if you make a mistake, stick with it regardless of how the coaches react.
- Be confident. Don't hesitate on a rule, ask for help if you need to. You will have 3 other sideline referees there to help you out.
- Keep an eye on the time. These are 20 minute halves with a 5 minute halftime.
- If you have coaches who are out of hand or parents, have the scorekeeper's radio for Tyler.
- Don't manipulate the rules.