

RYA FLAG FOOTBALL OFFICIAL RULE BOOK

Spring 2026

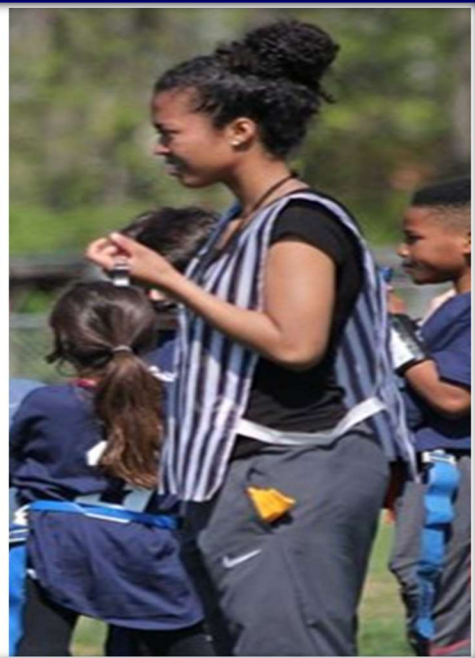


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1. GAME BASICS & SETUP

- Standard format is **7-on-7**, unless otherwise specified (girls' divisions and HS may vary based on numbers).
- If a team is short players, the opponent is not required to reduce its lineup.
- Game clock consists of **two 20-minute halves**.
 - 1st half: A running clock - game clock does not stop for dead ball plays
 - 2nd half: clock stops in the last two minutes of the game for dead ball plays: (incomplete passes, scoring plays, turnovers, out-of-bounds, penalties).
- No kickoffs—offenses begin at the **5-yard line**.
- No blocking or tackling. Players may set **stationary picks**, but may not move to impede defenders or run with the ball carrier.
- Offense has **4 downs to cross midfield for a first down**; then **3 downs to score**.
- On a 4th down play – referees will ask the coach if they would like to punt or go for the first down. If a team elects to punt; then possession starts at opponent's 5-yard line. There is no actual punting of the football.
- Failed 4th down attempts results in a turnover at the spot of the ball.
- Interceptions may be returned for a score (except under one-directional rules)
- Teams switch sides after halftime.
- Coach on-field rules:
 - Boys Grades 1–6: ONE coach allowed on the field.
 - Boys Grades 7–12: NO coaches on the field.
 - Girls Grades 1-8: ONE coach allowed
 - Girls Grades 9–12: NO coaches allowed.

2. REFEREES

- Referees will introduce themselves to each coach and team.
- Referees will wear a black & white stripe shirt.
- Referees will conduct an equipment check (proper team jersey, mouthpieces, proper flag placement, shirts properly tucked in, no metal cleats).
- A coin toss determines which team gets first possession of the ball.
- The Home team gets to call 'Heads or Tails'.

- The winner of the toss decides to take possession of the ball or defer their possession of the ball to the second half.
- The losing team decides which direction they would like to go on offense.
- There will be 2 – 3 referees assigned to a field

3. ATTIRE / EQUIPMENT

- Cleats are not required but highly recommended! Must have rubber teeth/spikes (**metal spikes are strictly prohibited**). Inspections will be conducted.
- All players must wear a **protective mouthpiece**—no exceptions. A player without one will incur a **10-yard penalty** and cannot play until they have a mouth guard.
- **Official league jerseys** must be worn during play. If forgotten, an alternate uniform must be approved by the opposing head coach or the player may not participate.
- Flag belts must remain visible and unobstructed by clothing.
- RYA will provide the official game flags. Teams may not use their own flags for games.
- Coaches will receive one pre-game warning for uniform violations.
- **NO Jewelry:** No necklaces, earrings, bracelets, watches
- Jerseys should be tucked into the shorts or pants. The flag belt and flags should be fully viewable and uncovered.

4. PLAYER PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES

- Every player must have a starting position (either on offense or defense), and play the entire possession for their starting position (unless sick or injured).
- At each change of possession, all players on the sideline must rotate in.
- Full compliance with the participation rule is mandatory. Coaches who fail to comply will receive an unsportsmanlike penalty (15yds). If repeated, a coach can face sanctions such as game forfeiture, and/or suspension.

5. GAME CLOCK & TIME MANAGEMENT

- Game last 40 minutes per game. Consists of (2) **20-minute halves**.
 - 1st half: A running clock - game clock does not stop for dead ball plays. **Note: referees can stop the clock at their discretion depending on the situation** (such as an extended injury or rule disagreement / discussion / clarification).
 - 2nd half: clock stops in the last two minutes of the game for dead ball plays: (incomplete passes, scoring plays, turnovers, change of possessions, out-of-bounds, penalties).

- 30 second play clock: Offense has 30 seconds to snap after the ball has been spotted at the line-of-scrimmage - (40 seconds for Boys Grades 1-2 and Girls 1-2).
- One warning before a **delay-of-game penalty**.
- Timeouts: each team gets (2) time-outs per half: ONE **60-second** and ONE **30-second**. **Note:** The time-outs do not carry over from the first half to the second half if unused in the first half.
- Only in the final 2 minutes of regulation: clock stops for incompletions, scoring plays, change of possession, turnovers, out-of-bounds, and penalties. Unless one team is officially slaughtered or up by 21 points the game clock will stay running.

6. OVERTIME GUIDELINES

- The home team calls the coin toss (heads-or-tails). The winner chooses whether to start on offense or defense.
- There is no longer a game clock (play clock still remains).
- Format is based on extra point format – which means one play.
- All regulation rules and penalties still apply.
- Interceptions may be returned for 2 points.
- No timeouts are allowed in overtime.

Round 1:

- The offensive team chooses whether to go for 1 or 2.
 - **1 point play** – ball spotted at the **5-yard line**
 - **2 points play** – ball spotted at the **12-yard line**
 - If the first team on offense scores, the second team has a chance to match or beat the score. If the second team fails to match or beat the score, the first team wins.

Round 2:

- Both teams must go for 2 points from the 12-yard line.
 - If the first team on offense scores, the second team has a chance to match or beat the score. If the second team fails to match or beat the score, the first team wins.

Round 3:

- Each team gets one play from the 5-yard line, driving out from the end zone. The team that gains the most yards wins that round and is awarded 1 point, which is added to their final score.

Overtime (Playoffs Only)

RULES

- The home team calls the coin toss. The winner chooses whether to start on offense or defense.
- If a second overtime round is needed, the team that lost the initial coin toss will choose offense or defense first.
- For each additional round, teams alternate who gets the first choice.
- The referee will decide which end of the field is used for overtime
- All regulation rules and penalties still apply.
- No timeouts are allowed in overtime.
- Interceptions may be returned and are worth 2 points.

7. SCORING GUIDELINES

- Touchdown: **6 points**.
- Extra Point:
 - 1 point from the 5-yard line (no run zone except for the 1-2 grade division).
 - 2 points from the 12-yard line (run or pass).
- Defensive returns on extra points:
 - 1-point try: play is dead on interception.
 - 2-point try: interception may be returned for 2 points.
- Safety: **2 points** + possession of the ball for the team that caused the safety.

8. BALL CARRIER / RUNNING

- The quarterback position **MAY NOT RUN** the ball beyond the line-of-scrimmage under any circumstances. The QB can scramble behind the line-of-scrimmage to avoid a defensive rush.
- Once a ball carrier crosses the line-of-scrimmage – teammates must stop moving and are not allowed to run along side of the ball carrier.
- Offensive players running the ball carrier is considered blocking.
- Once a handoff/lateral is made, the defense may cross the line of scrimmage.
- Multiple handoffs/laterals allowed **behind** the line of scrimmage.
- Handoffs, laterals/pitches are **NOT ALLOWED** beyond the line of scrimmage.

- Hand-off to a receiver – then the receiver may pass as long as they are still behind the line-of-scrimmage.
- **No-Run Zone:** Players are not allowed to run the ball when the ball is within 5 yards before midfield and 5 yards before each end zone. Team must pass the ball. (Except for the Grades 1-2).
- **A legal pass** must cross the line-of- scrimmage with the receiver catching the ball beyond the line-of-scrimmage. A backwards pass is not allowed when in the no-run-zone.
- Ball is spotted at the ball carrier’s hips when flag is pulled. The location of the ball does not determine the spot of the ball. A ball carrier’s hips must cross the endzone to be considered a touchdown. Reaching the ball into the endzone is not considered a touchdown if their hips/flags are outside the endzone.
- **FLAG GUARDING:** Runners are not allowed to impeded access to their flag in any circumstances beyond making running moves.
- **NO FUMBLES:** If a player drops the ball while running – the play is dead at the spot where the ball hits the ground. Offense maintains possession unless the play results in a turnover on downs.
- **NO JUMPING:** Jumping or diving by the ball carrier to advance the ball or avoid a flag pull is illegal, resulting in a 5- yard penalty and a dead ball at the spot of the jump. Jumping is permitted to catch a pass, avoid a collision, or defend a pass from a receiver. Spinning is allowed.
- **Note: Players are not allowed to try and block a pass being thrown by a QB.**

9. RECEIVING & PASSING GUIDELINES

- All players are eligible to receive passes (including QB after handoff).
- Only one player in motion at a time.
- Receiver must have **one foot in bounds** for a completed pass.
- After a completed pass beyond the line of scrimmage; all other offensive players must stop moving (to avoid illegal blocking).
- QB has a **7-second pass clock**. If the ball is not released within 7 seconds; the play is dead. This results in a loss of down. Ball spotted at the original line-of-scrimmage.
- Shovel passes are allowed.
- Interceptions may be returned (except under one-directional rules).
- No laterals/passes/backwards pitches beyond the line-of-scrimmage

- If the receiver drops the ball after a completed pass – the play is dead (NO FUMBLES). The ball is spotted at the location of the dropped ball.
- **Illegal Forward Pass:** Two forward passes are not allowed
- **Illegal Forward Pass:** If the QB/passers' **entire body** is beyond the line-of-scrimmage upon release of the ball, this is an illegal pass. Play is blown dead, loss of down, ball spotted at the original line-of-scrimmage. **Note:** If the passer has one foot still behind the line-of-scrimmage upon release of the ball – then it is considered a legal pass (the entire body must be beyond the line-of-scrimmage).

10. DEAD BALLS / BALL SNAPPING

- **Grades 1 – 6:** Ball can be snapped between the legs or sideways
- **Grades 7 – HS:** Ball must be snapped between the legs in one continuous motion.
- **Play is dead when:** A flag is pulled, ball carrier runs out-of- bounds, ball carrier drops the ball, incomplete pass, touchdown, safety, change of possession, penalty. **(Reminder: Clock does not stop on dead ball balls until the last 2 minutes of the game).**
- A sack occurs if the quarterback's flags are pulled behind the line of scrimmage. The ball will be spotted at the location of the QB when the flag is pulled.
- **LIVE BALL ON DROPPED SNAPS:** A dropped ball between center and QB on the snap can be picked-up and continue play in all age groups. Whomever picks up the ball is designated as the QB and must still handoff or pass the ball (they cannot run the ball). Defensive players that lined-up within 7 yards are not allowed to cross the line-of-scrimmage until the ball is handed-off. The blitzing player that lined-up 7 or 10 yards from the line-of-scrimmage is still allowed to blitz.
- After gaining control of the dropped snap from the center: At that point, if the QB drops the ball during a handoff or accidentally drops the ball while attempting to pass – then the play is dead. The ball is placed at the spot of the drop.

11. SAFETY GUIDELINES

- If the ball carriers (QB/RB/WR) flags are pulled in their own endzone, this will result in a safety. 2-points and the ball are awarded to the defensive team.
- If the quarterback (QB) and running back (RB) drop the ball during their exchange, in their own end zone, the play is dead and results in a 'SAFETY'. 2-points are awarded to the defensive team and they receive the ball on offense.
- If the QB drops the ball in the endzone and a defensive player touches the ball the ball while still on the ground – the play is dead and results in a 'SAFETY'. 2-points and the ball are awarded to the defensive team.

- **EXCEPTION:** Snapping the ball outside of end zone does not result in a safety but the play is dead. The ball will be returned to original line-of- scrimmage with loss of down.

12. RUSHING THE QB / BLITZING GUIDELINES:

- Blitzing defensive players must be lined-up 7 or 10 yards from the line-of-scrimmage in order to rush the QB on the snap of the ball.
- **IMPORTANT:** The rusher is not allowed to rush until the center position moves the ball. If the defensive player leaves early and crosses the line-of-scrimmage before the QB releases the ball – this is considered an ILLEGAL RUSH.
- There will be measured rush markers on the field for players to line-up behind.
- There is no limit to the number of players who can rush the QB.
- **7- yard rush mark:** Grades 1–6
- **10-yard rush mark:** Grades 7-12
- **NON-RUSHERS:** Defensive players not lined-up behind the rush marker are not allowed to cross the line-of-scrimmage until the QB releases the ball. Once the QB releases the ball – all defenders may cross the line-of-scrimmage.
 - Once an ineligible blitzer crosses the line-of-scrimmage before the QB releases the ball – it is an illegal rush. The play continues and offense can accept or decline the penalty. **The player cannot cross back over to avoid the penalty.**
- **DEFENDERS CANNOT ATTEMPT TO BLOCK OR KNOCK DOWN A PASS BY THE QB. THE FOCUS IS SOLELY ON PULLING THE FLAGS! RUSHERS ARE NOT ALLOWED TO RUSH WITH THEIR HANDS IN THE AIR!**
- A defender can raise their hand to catch the ball once the QB releases the ball.

13. FLAG PULLING GUIDELINES / FLAG GUARDING

- Only (1) Flag needs to be pulled from the ball carrier’s belt to be considered a tackle
- **Inadvertent Dropped Flag:** If a ball carrier’s flag falls off from the belt without being pulled – the play is still live – defense needs to tag the runner with one hand anywhere on their body.
- Ball carriers are NOT allowed to hold their flag to prevent them from being pulled.
- Ball carriers are NOT allowed to hand guard their flag to prevent them from being pulled.
- Ball carriers are NOT allowed to use running motion with their arms near their flag.
- Ball carrier’s hips/flags determine the spot of the ball.
- Stiff arm while running the ball is consider flag guarding.
- Ball carriers are allowed to move or twist their hips to avoid a flag pull.

14. BALL SIZES GUIDELINES

BOYS DIVISION	BALL SIZES
GRADES: 1 – 2 & 3 - 4	K2 / Peewee / Size 5
GRADES: 5 – 6	TDJ / Junior / Size 6
GRADES: 7 – 8	TDY / Youth / Size 7
HIGH SCHOOL	NFHS / Official / Size 9

GIRLS DIVISION	BALL SIZES
GRADES: 1 – 3	K2 / Peewee / Size 5
GRADES: 4 – 6	TDJ / Junior / Size 6
GRADES: 7 – 8	TDY / Youth / Size 7
HIGH SCHOOL	TDY / Youth / Size 7

Teams are not required to use an RYA provided football for games – but must use the proper size football based on division as outlined above.

15. SLAUGHTER RULE

- If a team leads by 35+ points – the game is officially over in terms of the reported score. The game will continue as normal with exception:
 - The losing team gets 4 downs to get a first down and 4 downs to score a touchdown.
 - The winning team must always start at the 5-yard line when back on offense
 - The game clock will be a running clock for the remainder of the game. The game clock will not stop in the last 2 minutes of the game.
- The winning team coach should use this opportunity for players who normally do not run the ball to run the ball.
- Your normal scorers should no longer run the ball.

16. PLAYOFF FORMAT

- **ALL TEAMS MAKE THE PLAYOFFS**
- Seeding is based on regular season wins and losses and strength of schedules/ranking.
- Ranking is determined as follows:
 - EACH WIN – the gets 12 points per win
 - EACH WIN by a defeated opponent – the team gets 1 point for each win
 - IF TEAMS have equal rankings – use head-to-head match-ups
 - IF they beat each other (3-way tie) use a coin flip
- **THE NUMBER OF POINTS SCORED DURING THE SEASON IS NOT A FACTOR!**

- We DO NOT want a team trying to run up the score thinking this will improve their playoff seedings/rankings – it does not!

17. SPORTSMANSHIP

- Tackling, elbowing, blocking, or cheap shots = **immediate ejection + 15-yard penalty**.
- Trash talk, taunting, or showboating = **1 warning**, then ejection + 15-yard penalty.
- Coaches, parents, or spectators engaging in unsportsmanlike conduct may cause game forfeits and further discipline.

18. ROSTER GUIDELINES

- Only players officially registered on their team roster can participate in their assigned games. Playing unregistered players, players from other teams' rosters, and/or jersey swapping is strictly prohibited. Violation of this rule shall result in a game forfeiture and potential suspension of the coach.
- Once the Rosters are finalized – a binder with the team official rosters will be kept at the table. If a coach wants to challenge it – they can check it. If a violation is found – then this can shall result in a game forfeiture and potential suspension of the coach. The determination will be decided by the league commissioner.

19. PENALTIES: DEFENSE

- Offsides: 5 yards, repeat down
- Pass interference: 5 yards, repeat down
- Illegal contact (holding/blocking): 5 yards, repeat down
- Illegal flag pull: 5 yards, repeat down
- Illegal rush (inside 7/10-yard marker): 5 yards, repeat down
- Too many players: 5 yards, repeat down
- Unsportsmanlike conduct: 15 yards, automatic 1st down

20. PENALTIES: OFFENSE

- Illegal motion/false start: 5 yards, repeat down (play blown dead)
- Illegal forward pass: 5 yards from the line-of-scrimmage, loss of down
- Illegal contact (holding/blocking): 5 yards, repeat down
- Offensive pass interference: 5 yards from the line-of-scrimmage, loss of down
- Flag guarding: 5 yards from spot, loss of down
- Charging: 5 yards from the spot, loss of down

- Jumping: 5 yards from spot, loss of down
- Delay of game: 5 yards, replay down (clock stops; cannot be declined)
- Too many players: 5 yards, repeat down
- Unsportsmanlike conduct: 15 yards, loss of down
- **No-Run Zone violation:** 5 yards, loss of down (must pass beyond LOS)
 - A team cannot penalize out of the no run zone. Once in the no run zone – the team must pass regardless if they move back due to penalties.

21. ONE DIRECTIONAL PLAY (SPECIAL FORMAT)

- Drives start from **midfield (No-Run Zone line)**.
- Each team has **3 downs to score**—no first downs.
- All possessions go in the **same direction**.
- Touchdowns scored as normal; extra points attempted as normal.
- **Interceptions:** no returns; ball reset to midfield for intercepting team.
- If team fails to score in 3 downs, possession changes at midfield.
- No safeties, if flag is pulled it will return to the line of scrimmage
- No returning of 2-point conversions