



The Andover Football Association is providing this manual with the hope that it can help coaches do the best possible job of coaching. This manual has something for everyone, whether you are coaching flag or contact, or 2<sup>nd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Coaches will find practice planning, teaching progressions, practice planning and other information to help you coach your teams. Youth coaches need to be aware of their important role in the development of the football program in Andover. The coaching theory section contains information to help you lead your players in a positive way and organize your season. This section also contains methods for teaching football fundamental skills, first on air, second using a pad, third half speed, and fourth full speed.



# **Andover Football Association**

## **K-2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Flag Football Rules**



The goal of flag football is to introduce young athletes to the game of football in a “non-contact” environment. This program will provide a learning setting with emphasis in the following areas of the game:

- 1) Proper fundamentals
- 2) The various football positions
- 3) The skills required at each of the positions
- 4) Football terminology
- 5) The rules of the game
- 6) Good sportsmanship

It is our strong belief that when these aspects of the game are taught without introducing the element of contact, young players will be better prepared to play the game in the future.

This is an instructional and developmental league with a secondary emphasis on competition. The non-contact rule will be strictly enforced by the coaches/referees.

### **SQUAD SELECTION**

- 1) Teams will consist of approximately 9-12 players.

### **EQUIPMENT**

- 1) Game jersey, flags and belt (provided by league)
- 2) Good fitting athletic shoes – molded cleats are allowed.
- 3) Mouth guard (recommended)
- 4) Water bottle (recommended)

### **PRACTICE/SCRIMMAGE/GAME**

- 1) Teams will practice, scrimmage or play games at most two times per week for no longer than 1 ½ hours each.

### **FIELDS**

- 1) 60 yards long and 40 yards wide with 10-yard end zones. First downs will be measured by 15-yard permanent markers. If game is to be played on a field marked for 80 yards, place cones on the 10-yard line to create a new goal line.

### **GAMES**

- 1) Each game will consist of two 25-minute halves, running time. Clock will only stop after touchdowns in last 2 minutes of each half.
- 2) A coin toss determines who gets the ball on offense first. The loser of the coin toss takes the initial offensive possession of the second half.
- 3) Each team is allowed four downs to make a first down or score. 15 yards for a first down.
- 4) In the event of a tie, each team will be given four plays to score from the 15 yard line with an ensuing extra point try. If the game is still tied, it will be recorded as an official tie.
- 5) 6 offensive and 6 defensive players and one coach from each team are allowed on the field.
- 6) A new backfield must accompany each offensive series.
- 7) Coaches are encouraged to huddle their offense quickly and start a new play in a timely fashion. A 45 second time limit is enforced between plays.
- 8) The coaches on the field are to work together to referee the game.

### **PLAYING TIME/PARTICIPATION**

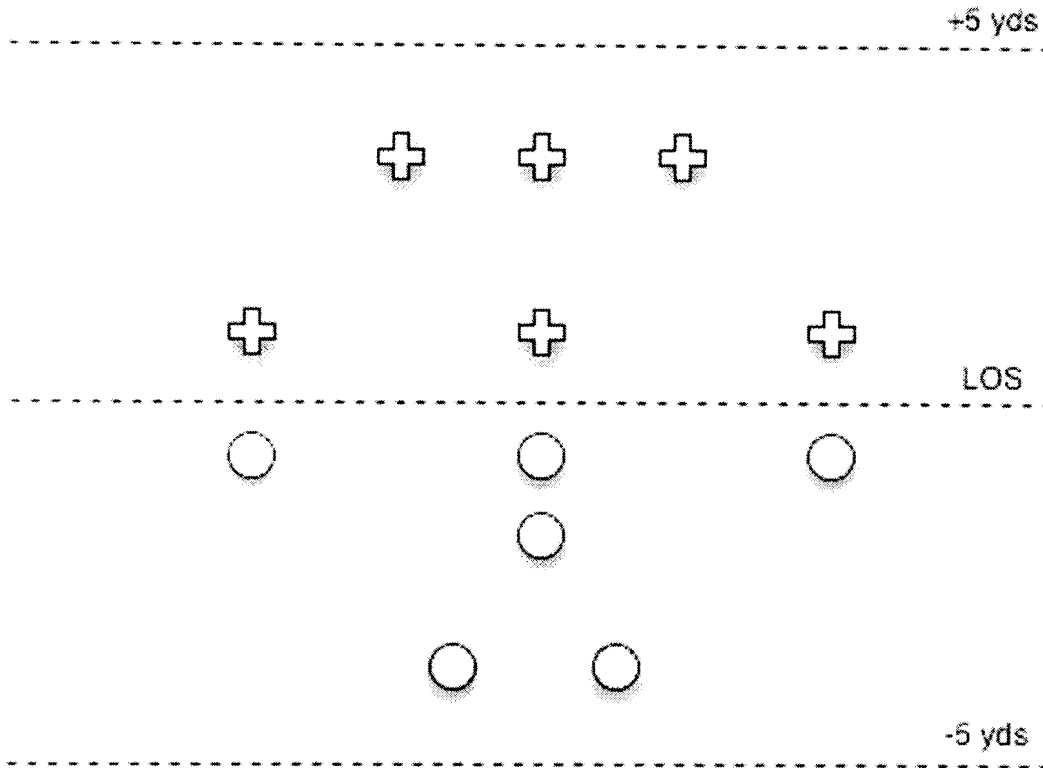
- 1) Players must play half of the game on offense and half of the game on defense.
- 2) With every new offensive series, players should play different offensive positions.
- 3) Over the course of a game, try and rotate all players through all 6 offensive positions.
- 4) If a coach/referee notices a player repeating an offensive position during the game (including quarterback), a warning will be issued. If this behavior continues, it will result in a 15-yard penalty with loss of down. While everyone wants to win, participation and skill development are more important.

### **TYPICAL PLAY SEQUENCE**

- 1) All offensive players except the quarterback should be in a 3-point stance. The quarterback should be under center for a direct snap.
- 2) All defensive players should be in a 2-point stance, aligned no deeper than 5 yards from the line of scrimmage.
- 3) Quarterback will call signals to initiate snap.
- 4) Once the ball is snapped, the coach/referee shall start a 3 count.
- 5) The offense will get a 3 count to develop a play. A fumble behind the line of scrimmage during this count may be retrieved and play continues.
- 6) Once the 3 count is reached, the defensive team may cross the line of scrimmage.
- 7) The 3 count is not in effect once the ball is handed off or the quarterback leaves the pocket. Once this occurs, the defense is allowed to cross the line of scrimmage.
- 8) Fumbles after the 3 count are dead balls and cannot be advanced. The ball will be placed at the spot of the fumble.
- 9) Interceptions, tipped passes or fumbles caught out of the air can be advanced by either team. The play is over when either a player in possession of the ball has one of their flags removed by an opposing player, one knee touches the ground, the ball carrier steps out of bounds, a fumble, a dropped pass, or a score.

### **SCORING**

- 1) Touchdown: 6 Points
- 2) Extra Point: 1 Point (from 5 yard line)
- 3) Safety: 2 Points and loss of possession (ball will be kicked off from the 50 yard line to the defense team which scored the safety).



## OFFENSE

- 1) All players on offense are eligible receivers. Including the quarterback.
- 2) There must be 3 players on the line of scrimmage.
- 3) The quarterback must take a direct snap from center.
- 4) A team must have one running back in the backfield no wider than three yards from the quarterback.
- 5) Only one player is allowed to be in motion at a time.
- 6) Picks and screens on pass patterns are illegal.
- 7) At least one foot must be inbounds when making a reception.
- 8) A player may not be moving forward when blocking. A shuffle, in order to screen a defender is permitted. If contact is made, the offensive player should have their feet set as in basketball. Arms must be bent at the elbow and within reasonable range of the width of the player's shoulders (normal blocking technique applies).
- 9) Offensive players may obstruct opponent's path to the ball carrier, but not make substantial contact with the opponent.
- 10) All offensive players, except the quarterback, must be in a 3-point stance at the snap of the ball.
- 11) No stiff-arm or slapping away defenders arms. Penalty: 5-yard from infraction.
- 12) All fumbles are dead balls except offensive players may play the ball if dropped and picked up behind the line of scrimmage during the coach's/referee's count. No possession change. This avoids players going into a pile to retrieve the ball which may cause injury.
- 13) A fumble caught out of the air or deflected pass may be advanced by either team.
- 14) 45-second time limit between plays.

## **DEFENSE**

- 1) Defensive players may not initiate contact.
- 2) A defensive player may only grab for one flag. This will eliminate contact that would resemble a tackle. Pushing or tackling: 15-yard penalty from infraction.
- 3) When a defensive player grabs the opponent's flag, they shall stop immediately and hold the flag high over their head. This is for spotting purposes.
- 4) Defensive players shall not cross the line of scrimmage until the count of three by the coach/ referee: 5-yard penalty from line of scrimmage.
- 5) Defensive players may play man-to-man coverage.
- 6) Defensive players shall start each play in an athletic, 2-point stance, and align no deeper than five yards from the line of scrimmage.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS**

- 1) Kick-offs to start each half and after touchdowns will be from the 50-yard line.
- 2) The return team will not be penalized for muffing/dropping a kick or punt. The ball will be dead where it was first touched, and the return team will begin with first down.
- 3) A punt or kick (scwib) that comes to rest on the ground, may be picked up by the return team and advanced as long as it is done cleanly. A knee down or drop of the football will cause a dead ball situation.
- 4) No onside kicks are allowed.
- 5) The kicking team cannot recover the ball. They can only down it. The return team always retains possession.
- 6) Kickers and punters shall be alternated during a game until each team member has kicked.
- 7) A team must declare whether they will punt on 4<sup>th</sup> down.
- 8) The center shall attempt a long snap to the punter five yards back. No rush shall be attempted.
- 9) The return team blockers should attempt to screen the coverage players. The coverage team must avoid blockers and may not make contact with the return team blockers.

## **DEFENSIVE PENALTIES**

- 1) Offsides: 5 yard penalty from line of scrimmage
- 2) Illegal Procedure: defensive players lined up deeper than 5 yards -- 5 yard penalty from line of scrimmage.
- 3) Illegal Contact: defensive initiated contact -- 5 yard penalty from line of scrimmage
- 4) Excessive Contact: pushing, tackling, or grabbing for more than one flag -- 15 yard penalty from spot of foul

## **OFFENSIVE PENALTIES**

- 1) Offsides/False Start: moving forward before the ball is snapped -- 5 yard penalty from line of scrimmage
- 2) Delay of Game: 45 second clock expired -- 5 yard penalty from line of scrimmage
- 3) Illegal Motion: more than one player in motion at a time -- 5 yard penalty from line of scrimmage
- 4) Illegal Forward Pass: a player throwing a pass once they have gone beyond the line of scrimmage -- 5 yard penalty from line of scrimmage and loss of down
- 5) Offensive Pass Interference: pick play or pushing off -- 5 yard penalty from line of scrimmage and loss of down
- 6) Illegal Procedure: Moving forward while blocking, less than 3 players on line, all players excluding the quarterback not in 3 point stance -- 5 yard penalty from line of scrimmage.
- 7) Unsportsmanlike Conduct: offensive player repeats at a position (including the quarterback) for consecutive offensive series or in a way that limits participation to only "star" players -- 15 yard penalty from line of scrimmage and loss of down, after first warning.
- 8) Illegal Contact: stiff-arm, slapping defenders away -- 5 yard penalty from spot of foul
- 9) Excessive Contact: pushing, tackling or blocking to ground -- 15 yard penalty from line of scrimmage



# **Andover Football Association**

## **2<sup>nd</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Football Rules**

### **GAMES:**

All games will be played according to the published schedule. Games will be postponed because of weather and/or field conditions only. Postponements will be made only by the league director or the referees. If a game is postponed:

1. The coach will be notified by the league commissioner on the day of the scheduled game. It is the responsibility of the coach to notify the players of the postponement.
2. Postponed games will be rescheduled by the league commissioner only.
3. Referees may make the decision to postpone a game due to weather and/or field conditions once they are at the field.
4. Games will be postponed when the temperature is 15° F. and/or the wind-chill factor reaches 0° F.

League standings will be maintained for the purpose of tournament seeding; winning coaches are therefore required to call in the game score to their grade-level Director within 48 hours of the game.

Only players listed on the team roster may participate in practices and games.

### **EQUIPMENT:**

The association furnishes helmets, shoulder pads, football pants, and jerseys to each player. All equipment except the jersey must be returned by each player at the end of the season.

Any player not returning equipment at the end of the season will **NOT** be allowed to participate in Andover Football Association again until the equipment is returned.

**Helmets:** Do not apply your own stickers, decals, tape or markings to the helmets in any way. Only decals and tape issued by the association may be used.

**Footwear:** Tennis shoes or molded cleats –no metal or removable football spikes

**Mouth guards:** Must be supplied by player.

Athletic cup and supporter is required.

Any player not in full uniform, including mouth guard, will not be allowed to play in games or practices where contact is required.

### **Fields:**

- 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade will play on an 80 yard field
- 4<sup>th</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grades will play on a 100 yard field.

### **Football:**

- 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> will use a junior size football. Footballs must be brown or tan in color.
- 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> can use either a junior or youth size football. Footballs must be brown or tan in color.

**GAME TIME:**

Games will consist of four 15-Minute running time quarters. The clock will stop for the following reasons -

- An injury.
- A touchdown or safety. Time starts again on the ensuing kick off or free kick.
- A rules interpretation meeting between the coaches and referees.
- Time-outs. Each team has three 90-second time-outs per half.
- Stop-time will be in effect the last two minutes of each half. If a team is 17 or more points ahead with less than two minutes to play in the game running time will continue until the 17 point deficit is reduced.

**RULES:**

State High School League Rules will apply except for the following –

- Extra Points: 2 Points for a forward pass, one point for a run. The extra point play is from the 2 yard line.
- **Both teams will be on the same side of the field. Only coaches and players can be on the team side of the field. Each team must stay within the 20 yard line to the 45 yard line on their end of the field. All spectators are to watch the game from the opposite side of the field as the teams.**
- Equipment infractions such as not using a mouth guard, dangling chin strap, etc. will have a 5-yard penalty after one warning.
- Too many players on the field will have a 10-yard penalty. The penalty will not be called if the extra player is making an honest effort to get off the field before the snap.
- Major penalties will be 15 yards on a 100 yard field and 10 yards on 80 yard fields.
- Unsportsmanlike conduct will be a 15 yard penalty regardless of field length.
- Kick-offs will be from the 40 yard line on 100 yard fields and from the 35 yard line on 80 yard fields.
- **For grades 2 through 4** all punts must be declared. No player may move until the ball is punted. If the punter drops the snap he may simply pick it up and punt it. Each team must have 7 players on the line of scrimmage. Each team will receive one warning about movement before the ball is punted, after that movement will be assessed as a 5 yard penalty.
- **For grades 5 and 6** punts are live action and do not need to be declared.
- Ball carrier weight limits are as follows:

2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade.....	85lbs
4 <sup>th</sup> grade .....	95 lbs
5 <sup>th</sup> grade .....	120 lbs
6 <sup>th</sup> grade .....	130 lbs

Players in excess of these weights will have a stripe of red tape affixed to their helmet from front to back and will not be allowed to carry the ball except in the case of a fumble recovery, an interception, or a kick that *goes directly to the player* (i.e. no lateral or hand-off allowed).

For kick returns red stripe players are allowed in the first row only.

Red stripe players may not line up in the offensive back field or at wide receiver.

Red strip players may line up at tight end but they are ineligible to receive a pass.

Players are weighed at registration. If they are over the weight limit at that time they will be considered a red stripe for the entire season.

Violation of the weight limit rules will be penalized by ejection from the current game and suspension from the next game. A second violation will be penalized by the suspension of the coach and player for the remainder of the season. Violations of the weight limit rules will be reported to the AFA Commissioner and President.

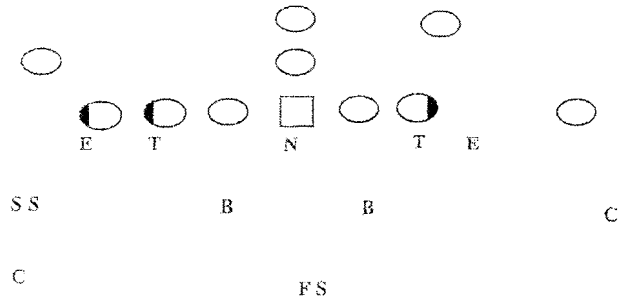
- The home-team coach is responsible for providing a crew to run the chains and the down marker.
- Referee judgment stands. Coaches may request a rule interpretation by calling a time out. If the coach who called the time out is correct and gets the call overturned by reference to the rules presented here no time-out will be charged. If the coach does not get the call overturned they will be charged with the time-out.
- **For 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade only** the coach may be on the field with the team for the purpose of calling plays and directing the players on his team. For all other grades the coaches must remain on the side lines in their designated team area.
- Tie games will be handled as follows: A coin will be flipped to determine who gets first possession. The visiting team gets to call the coin. The ball will be placed on the 10 yard line and the team with possession will have 4 plays to make a touchdown. If the team makes a touchdown they will be allowed an extra point attempt with scoring as indicated in these rules. The second team will get an equal number of attempts to make a touchdown. If the ball is turned over by fumble or interception it results in change of possession only – the ball cannot be advanced.
- Alcoholic beverages and smoking are not allowed at practices or games.
- Coaches are responsible for the conduct of themselves, their coaching staff, their players and their fans. Sportsmanship must be emphasized. It is very important that coaches, parents and fans demonstrate conduct that illustrates sportsmanship, respect and the education value of youth football.
- Blitzing is not allowed at any grade level. Linebackers and defensive backs may not rush until the quarterback hands off the ball or leaves the pocket.
- **For 2<sup>nd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup>** the only defensive line-up allowed is a 5-2. Sixth grade may use either a 5-2 or a 4-3 (see diagram). Linebackers must line up at least one foot behind the defensive linemen.
- For all grades any defensive lineup is allowed inside the 5 yard line.
- The offense must line up at least 7 players on the line. An unbalanced line is not allowed.
- The end or wide receiver may go into motion after being set.
- A team will be given one warning regarding the allowed line-ups described here. Further infractions to the line up rules will be assessed as a 5 yard penalty.
- If the defense commits a line-up infraction it will be treated as a delayed dead-ball foul and assessed after the completion of the play. The offense will have the option to decline or accept the penalty.
- If the offense commits a line-up infraction it will be a dead-ball foul and the play will be stopped.

**DEFENSIVE RULES AND ALIGNMENTS:**

Teams in grades 2<sup>nd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> must use a standard 5-2 defense as shown below. Teams in 6<sup>th</sup> grade can use the 5-2 front or the 4-3 front as outlined below.

Linebackers must line up at least one foot behind the defensive linemen. Defensive linemen must align and shade on the offensive linemen. **There is NO blitzing.** Defensive backs can align anywhere in the secondary at all grade levels.

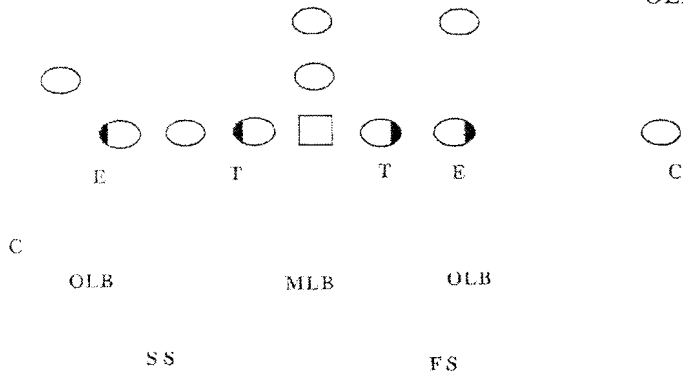
5 - 2



5 - 2 ALIGNMENT

- E - 7
- T - 5
- N - 0
- LB - 2

4 - 3



4 - 3 ALIGNMENT

- E - 7 or 5
- Depending on SE or TE
- T - 3
- MLB - 0
- OLB - Behind Ends

**2005 NORTH SUBURBAN FOOTBALL  
GENERAL RULES AND PROCEDURES**

1. Divisions of Play - There are three (3) divisions of play:
  - 1) 7th Grade Unlimited; 2) 8th Grade Unlimited
  - 3) 7th and 8th Grade Weight Limit - **The weight limit is 130 pounds this year.**

7th Grade Unlimited - Rosters may consist of 7th graders only. There is no weight limit or weight restriction. An area may roster a 6th grader if it desires, provided that the parents of the 6th grader sign an informed waiver. *We need to be careful how we draw our 7<sup>th</sup> grade divisions if some areas fill teams with only big 7<sup>th</sup> graders.*

8th Grade Unlimited - Rosters may consist of 7th and 8th graders. There is no weight limit or weight restriction.

7th-8th Grade Weight Limit - Rosters may consist of 7th and 8th graders under 130 pounds. Players are required to weigh on a medical scale or scale of similar quality before each game, unless both coaches agree to waive the weigh-in. Players are allowed to strip to their shorts to make the weight. The host team of a weight limit game is responsible for providing a sheltered area that provides a reasonable degree of privacy for the weigh in and a medical scale or scale of similar quality. *Note: There is a proposal on the table to waive all weigh-ins this year upon early season certification from each area director that fields a weight-limit team.*
2. "Reasonable Drawing Area" - It is the philosophy of this league that "outlaw teams," "all-star teams," or teams consisting of players outside a reasonable drawing area are prohibited. This league has quadrupled in size over the past five years because our coaches and area directors have remained committed to establishing a competitive league within reasonable, common sense parameters. As a general rule, players from a team must come from the same high school area or the same bona fide youth sports organization. (For example, Fridley and Andover draw their teams from their school district area. Osseo-Maple Grove draws from the defined parameters of the Osseo-Maple Grove Athletic Association, etc.) The league absolutely reserves the right to remove teams or areas that it finds are not abiding with the spirit of this philosophy. If you want to load up a team for the purpose of satisfying your ego, it is your absolute right to do so, but find somewhere else to play. *Any program that turns away participants based upon ability raises some concerns in this regard.*
3. "Host Team" - A "host team" is defined as a team at whose fields a game is scheduled at on a particular date. The host team is responsible for having the field marked properly, the chains out, and the lights on for all scheduled games on that particular date. In addition, the host team must provide a medical scale or scale of similar quality for weight limit games, and a suitable sheltered area to conduct the weigh-in. *Area directors are responsible for assuring that these items are provided for all games scheduled at their field.* For example, for 3 games scheduled for 4:30, 6:00 and 7:30 on a Sunday at Coon Rapids Sand Creek Park, Coon Rapids is responsible for having the field ready at 4:30.

4. **"Home Team"** - The "home team" is the second team listed on the schedule and is responsible for providing the chain gang. (Not the chains, which is the host team's responsibility.) **WE DO NOT SWITCH CHAIN GANGS AT HALFTIME.**
5. **Officials** - The bulk of our officials are scheduled through Arnie Mavis of Gopher State Officials Association, Chuck Hollinback of Anoka, and the Blaine Officials Association. The vast majority of these officials are certified, are of good quality, and also officiate freshman, sophomore and varsity contests. That being said, they do blow calls. We are all competitive, but we must take extra steps to keep our teams and fans under control. There simply are not enough officials to go around, and these officials will not put up with any crap, especially from parents. Arnie Mavis and Jim Hanson do all of the scheduling of officials. We have had very few problems over the past several years, but coaches and area directors are reminded that they are responsible for keeping their fans under control.
6. **Schedules** - Teams with high quality lighted fields get more "host games." This is reality, and inform your coaches and parents in advance. In addition, coaches and parents must remember that we must schedule games in two, three or four game blocks in order to get officials. Some teams may only have two or three "host" games per season. It is not a bad idea to inform your parents in advance of the necessity of scheduling games in "blocks" and the fact that many teams may play only a couple of games at their field.
7. **Rescheduling Games** - Games can be rescheduled only in the most limited of circumstances. It is a tremendous hassle to reschedule games. *Most of our scheduling "gaffes" in recent years have occurred when games are rescheduled, either to different dates or to different sites.* In the event it becomes necessary to reschedule, the area director who desires to reschedule must contact all of the areas involved (remember, there will be at least two, and maybe more games scheduled at a particular field on a particular date), notify John Swanson and also contact Arnie Mavis.

Missing one or two players or your star halfback is not an acceptable reason to reschedule. The most common reasons to reschedule are basketball or hockey tryouts that result in large blocks of players being absent. If you can field a team, however, play the game as scheduled. *Area directors must do everything possible in advance to obtain hockey and basketball tryout dates, so we can schedule around these conflicts without having to juggle schedules in late September and early October.*

### PLAYING RULES

National Federation Rules apply, with the following modifications:

1. Ten minute stop time quarters, except that the referee will start the clock when the chains are set after a change of possession, unless the clock has been stopped for another reason. (Such as a time out, or an out of bounds or incomplete pass on the last play before the change of possession). We have found that this modification is needed to enable the games to be completed in 90 minute blocks.

2. Two points for a conversion kick, one point for a conversion run or pass.
3. In the event of a tie game, only one (1) overtime period will be played (unless the game is a playoff game). If the game remains tied after one overtime, it ends in a tie. Coaches may not waive or modify this rule.
4. Teams may use either a regulation or intermediate size ball. Teams may use their own ball when they are on offense, but must arrange to get the ball in quickly. Officials become frustrated when this is not done efficiently.
5. The league reserves the right to ban players, coaches, or parents for repeated acts of unsportsmanlike or abusive behavior. This has been a rare occurrence during the many years this league has been in existence. Most coaches and area directors have done a great job of policing themselves.
6. Coaches are strongly encouraged to meet with the officials before each game, and review the playing rules. We have had a few occasions over the years where the officials were confused about the level they were officiating and the rules. For example, it is strongly suggested that coaches meet with the officials, and remind them: "This is North Suburban 7th grade, we play ten minute stop-time quarters, two points for a kick, etc." Most of the time, the officials will know, but it is a good idea to review this with the officials anyway.
7. There are no special restrictions on offenses, defenses, blitzing or anything else. This is straight football. There are no minimum playing time requirements. Each area is free to set their own playing time policies. Worry about your own program, and not the other guy. Everybody with any amount of common sense, experience, and intelligence knows that the programs that play the most players are the programs that are the most successful at the high school level. If a team decides not to play all of their players, that is their business, and their problem.
8. "Host Team" - The team at whose fields games are scheduled at on a particular date is the "host team" and is responsible for having the field marked properly, the lights on, the chains out, and (for weight limit games) a quality scale available for all games scheduled on that night.
9. "Home Team" - The second team listed on the schedule is the home team and is responsible for providing the chain gang. We do not switch chain gangs at halftime.
10. Weight Limit League - The weight limit for the weight limit league is 130 pounds. Players may strip to their shorts to make weight. A weigh-in must be conducted before each game unless both coaches waive the weigh-in. Over the years, on occasion, weight limit coaches have agreed to waive the weigh in for particular games at the end of the season if both coaches know all of their players have made the weight during the season. This is acceptable if both coaches agree, but coaches are reminded that it is the absolute right of a coach to request a weigh-in. Coaches should remind their players close to the weight limit, and more important, the parents of those players, that there is no "absolute waiver" of the weigh-in and players should always be prepared to weigh-in.

## MISCELLANEOUS

1. Reporting Scores - We will designate one coach or area director to receive scores for each division. We plan on having a web site available this year for each division. Remember that regardless of the mechanism for reporting scores, whether via web, e-mail, fax, or voice mail, the system requires coaches to report. Do not report scores to John Swanson.
2. Playoffs - Because of the number of teams anticipated and our commitment to a ten game regular season, we will, at most, have abbreviated playoffs. Some years we have had an abbreviated playoff for the 7th grade divisions, and the champion of each division in the 8th grade unlimited played each other. Teams that win their own division can buy their own trophies if they want to. *The league does not buy trophies.*
3. Cooperation - We all are competitive, we all want to win, and this league encourages high-level competition. Please remember, however, that this league has prospered because the coaches and directors have tempered their competitiveness with common sense, reasonableness, and a focus toward the long-term. Many of our coaches and area directors no longer, or have never had kids playing, and are committed to the long-term success of this league and of football in general. Please remember that football gets squeezed by the single-sport nuts, and football will not maintain its popularity unless we do things to encourage participation.
4. Serious Disputes - Please do not get John Swanson involved unless there is a serious problem that cannot be resolved.

# Code of Conduct

Contributed by Jerry Norton

## Always...

\* Always remember the top three priorities in youth sports should be (in this order):

1. safety
2. fun
3. learning / skill development

\* Always be a positive influence for players, other coaches and parents.

\* Always praise both teams for their effort.

\* Always balance criticism with praise.

\* Always provide each player with the best possible instruction.

## Never...

\* Never let your desire to win interfere with any of the three priorities.

\* Never ridicule a player or an official.

\* Never dispute an official's decision.

\* Never use profanity, alcohol or tobacco on the athletic field.

The 7 Guiding Principles of  
NFL Youth Programs  
By: Scott Lancaster  
Senior Director, NFL Youth Football Development

The NFL Youth Programs were developed to help kids and their families have an enjoyable experience every time they step on a football field. As part of this, the NFL asked kids, parents, and coaches about their likes, dislikes, and concerns, not only with playing football, but with the overall youth sports experience.

As a result of this research, we have developed seven guiding principles that make up the overall philosophy that we apply to all the NFL Youth Programs.

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1. Make It Fun

This is the primary objective and cornerstone of the entire philosophy. Regardless of whether it's a game or a practice, football at the youth level should always be fun. This requires a little creativity on the part of the parent/coach to offer and adopt fun methods throughout all aspects of their program. Incorporate games and low-key competitions to teach fundamentals rather than running traditional drills.

2. Limit Standing Around

This is a common problem with youth sports that ultimately turns kids off. Whether it's a game, practice, clinic, or camp, we have designed all of our programs to engage every participant consistently. Kids don't attend practice to watch others play. Kids enjoy practices when they have fun and they experience an improvement in their overall skills. Many professional coaches put a major emphasis on fast paced and interactive practices that eliminate downtime. You will see your team's attention and energy levels improve immediately when you engage the entire team in drills of short duration.

3. Everyone Plays

Football at the youth level should be an inclusive experience. It is never fun at any level of play to sit and watch others participate, anticipating the opportunity to play if the situation arises. The youth level of football should be an equal learning experience for everyone, whether it's a game or a practice.

How often have you either experienced or witnessed a practice where several players are being instructed and drilled while a group of teammates stand around and watch, never receiving the same attention? Most often the group standing around has been deemed by

their coach to be not as skilled or talented, therefore, the attention is paid to the so-called "stars" of the team.

A coach is a teacher. A teacher/coach's job is to raise the level of learning and skills of not only the most talented, but for everyone on the team, starting with the least talented. The NFL philosophy eliminates first, second, and third strings in both games and at practice.

#### 4. Teach Every Position To Every Participant

Don't pigeonhole kids in one particular position because of their physical size and/or ability. In order to provide each participant a full experience and appreciation for the game that will last a lifetime, we encourage all programs to teach everyone every position.

As we all know, kids grow at various rates. A smaller child may develop late and become much larger than his/her present size indicates and vice versa. How many athletes has football lost throughout the years because of coaches taking the largest kids and making them play the line? These kids often experienced an entire football season without touching the football.

Kids should have the opportunity to experience every position. As Peter Brock, former center for the New England Patriots, explains to youth coaches in the Boston area, "What a tragedy it would've been for New England Patriots football history if Drew Bledsoe had been told as a big kid beginning youth football that he could not play quarterback, and was forced to play the line due to his size. Who knows? He may have dropped out of football like so many other kids in his situation and gone on to play baseball, another sport, or dropped out of athletics completely.">

A youth coach's job is to introduce and teach every position to every kid. Never make judgments based on someone's size alone; teach every participant every position and they will naturally find the position they belong in, and you will be in a better position to guide them.

#### 5. Emphasize The Fundamentals

Build a foundation that will never crack by properly teaching the basics. Learning the fundamentals and perfecting the same basics at every level of play is essential to having any chance of success.

Warning: Do not attempt to replicate plays you see in NFL and college games! Every scheme that is attempted in a college or NFL game is supported by years of training in the fundamentals of the game.

If one player does not execute the fundamentals of his position correctly, the most sophisticated scheme in the world will not work. It is unfair and not fun to focus on running plays that will fail 9 out of 10 times. Youth programs that focus on scheming plays over executing fundamentals are cheating every participant out of the chance to learn the game properly.

#### 6. Incorporate A Progression Of Skill Development For Every Participant

Regardless of a player's skill level, it is your responsibility as a youth football coach to teach every kid on your team. It is no secret that if kids experience improvement in their skills, no matter what their athletic ability may be, they will continue to participate and return to learn more.

#### 7. Yell Encouragement, Whisper Constructive Criticism

Keep it positive. As a youth football coach you should never tolerate negative comments from your players, parents, coaching staff, and especially yourself. Kids realize when they have made mistakes. What they don't need is to have that mistake compounded by negative feedback and comments. What they do need is feedback on how to correct the mistake supported by positive encouragement.