

Fox Valley Pop Warner – 2025 Flag Football Rules

06/19/25

GENERAL

Flag football games are played using a 5-on-5 format. The offense will have a center (or QB Tee), quarterback, and a mix of wide receivers and running backs. The defensive positions can include rushers and pass defenders which may include man-to-man and zone defensive strategies.

GRADE-BASED ADJUSTMENTS

2nd & 3rd Grade

1. "No Run" zones are eliminated. Teams may run anywhere on the field.
2. Defenders may NOT rush the passer unless there is a legal handoff executed in the backfield.
3. One Coach for each team is permitted on the field pre-snap to help players but MUST be off the field prior to the snap of the ball.
4. Defenders MUST line up at least 7 yards from the line of scrimmage prior to the snap. If the ball is spotted on or inside the 5-yard line, the distance is reduced to 3 yards.
5. NO PLAYERS MAY RUSH THE QUARTERBACK - THIS ALLOWS QUARTERBACKS THE FULL 7 SECONDS TO THROW THE BALL WITHOUT PRESSURE.

4th & 5th Grade

6. All players must be a minimum of 7 yards from the line-of-scrimmage when the ball is snapped.
7. 4th & 5th Grade - ONLY ONE PLAYER MAY RUSH THE QUARTERBACK - This player must raise their hand prior to the play (after the snapper touches the ball) to clearly identify themselves as a Blitzter to the Officials and Offensive team. Rushers MUST rush the passer immediately after the snap. Delayed rush is NOT permitted.
8. Players not rushing the quarterback can defend the line of scrimmage or play pass coverage.

GAME

1. At the start of each game, captains from both teams meet at midfield for the coin toss to determine who starts with the ball. The visiting team calls the toss.
2. The winner of the coin toss has the choice of offense or defense. The loser of the coin toss has the choice of direction. There is no option to defer. Teams will automatically switch sides of the field and the team that started the game with possession will begin the 2nd half on defense.
3. The offensive team takes possession of the ball at its 5-yard line and has (4) downs to cross midfield. Once a team crosses midfield, it has (3) downs to score a touchdown.
 - If the offensive team fails to cross midfield after 3rd down and elect to "punt" on 4th down, possession of the ball changes and the opposing team will start a new possession from its own 5-yard line. If the offensive team goes for it on 4th down and does not cross midfield, the opposing team will start a new possession from the spot where 4th down ended.
 - Any time there is a "PUNT or PLAY" decision on 4th or 3rd down, the referee WILL ask the offense's Head Coach to declare "PUNT or PLAY". The coach MUST make an immediate decision or risk a delay of game penalty.
 - Teams may use a timeout to change the declaration of "Play" at any time prior to the expiration of the play clock.
 - After crossing midfield, if the offense fails to score on 3rd down, the ball changes possession and the new offensive team starts at its 5-yard line
4. A touchdown is 6 points, and a safety is 2 points (1-point conversion from the 5-yard line; 2-point conversion from the 10-yard line).

Fox Valley Pop Warner – 2025 Flag Football Rules

06/19/25

EQUIPMENT

1. All players must wear FVPW flag belts and flags. All players MUST wear mouth guards at all times while on the playing field. FVPW FLAG jerseys must be worn.
2. Players must wear shoes. Molded rubber cleats may be worn. However, cleats with exposed metal are never allowed.
3. Players may tape their forearms, hands and fingers. Players may wear gloves, elbow pads and kneepads. Braces with exposed metals are not allowed.
4. Players must remove all jewelry and hats. Headbands or winter beanies are allowed.
5. Players may wear soft shell helmets, halos and sunglasses but they must be always secured while on the field. Prescription glasses are permitted without a strap.
6. Players' jerseys must be tucked into shorts or pants, if they hang below the belt line.
7. We recommend players wear FVPW FLAG shorts. Shorts or pants with belt loops or pockets must be taped. Games will not be delayed for a player to tape up pockets.
8. Participants must bring FLAG belts and mouth guards to the field. Extra belts and mouth guards may be available for purchase.
9. FLAG footballs will be provided by FVPW.
10. LEAGUE & TOURNAMENT PLAY: Electronic communication between any player with their coach or spectator for their team is prohibited. If a team or individual is using electronic communication with a player or coach, at any time, that team will be disqualified immediately from play. This does not limit possible additional discipline at the sole discretion of the local league organizer OR Tournament staff.

FIELD

1. The flag football field is approx. 25 yards wide x 60 yards long (+ 10-yard endzones).
2. Fields will have a midfield line to gain first down. "No Run Zones" are located 5 yards prior to midfield and 5 yards prior to the opponents endzone.
3. Stepping on the boundary line is considered out of bounds.
4. "No Run Zones" are in place to prevent teams from conducting run plays. While in the "No Run Zones", teams cannot run the ball across the line of scrimmage. All plays must result in a forward pass across the Line of Scrimmage.
5. The referee will spot the ball in the middle of the field prior to the "Ready to Play" whistle. The ball may NOT be closer than 10-yards to any sideline.

ROSTERS

1. Home teams wear dark jersey colors. Visiting teams wear light color jerseys (jerseys are reversible).
2. Teams must consist of at least five players.
3. Teams must start games with a minimum of five players. In the event of an injury, a team with insufficient substitute players may play with four players on the field but no fewer than four.

Fox Valley Pop Warner – 2025 Flag Football Rules

06/19/25

TIMING

1. The games are played with two 25-minute halves using a running clock. The clock only stops for halftime, injuries and at the Officials' discretion.
2. Halftime is 4 minutes.
3. Each time the ball is spotted, a team has 25 seconds to snap the ball. Teams will receive one warning before delay-of-game penalty is enforced.
4. Each team has three 30-second timeouts per game.
5. If the score is tied at the end of the regulation period, the game will remain a tie (no overtime period will be used).

SCORING

1. **Touchdown:** 6 points
2. **PAT** (point-after-touchdown) **1 point** (from the 5-yard line) or **2 points** (from the 10-yard line)
Note: A 1 point extra point is pass only; 2 point extra point can be a run or pass.
1 point PAT is pass only; 2 point PAT can be run or pass
3. Interceptions returned for scores during regulation scrimmage down are worth 6 points. Interceptions returned on 1 and 2 point extra point conversions are worth 2 points.
4. **Safety:** 2 points
A safety occurs when the ball-carrier is declared down in his/her end zone. Runners can be called down when their flags are pulled by a defensive player, a flag falls out, they step out of bounds, their knee or arm touches the ground, a fumble occurs in the end zone or if a snapped ball lands in or beyond the end zone.
5. A team that scores must declare whether it wishes to attempt a 1-point conversion (from the 5-yard line) or a 2 point conversion (from the 10-yard line). Any change, once a decision is made to try for the extra point, requires a charged timeout. A decision cannot be changed after a penalty.
6. After one team is winning by 28 points or more:
 - a. The winning team will not attempt a PAT after scoring a touchdown
 - b. The losing team will be given the ball to start at midfield.
7. Forfeits are scored 28-0 for the winning team.
8. The coaches, officials and scorekeeper must verify the score sheet. If a coach does not verify the score sheet before leaving the field, the scorekeeper will note on that score sheet and the score will be FINAL.

COACHES

1. Coaches are expected to adhere to FVPW FLAG philosophies, coaching guidelines and code of conduct.
2. Coaches are permitted to coach on the sideline.
 - All team photographers, managers, position coaches, team moms, fans, etc are required to remain off the playing field in the designated league viewing area.
 - Coaches are responsible for their fans' conduct and behavior plus any associated team members in their designated team area.

LIVE BALL/DEAD BALL

1. The ball is live at the snap of the ball and remains live until an official whistles the ball dead.
2. The official will indicate the neutral zone and line of scrimmage.

Fox Valley Pop Warner – 2025 Flag Football Rules

06/19/25

- It is an automatic dead ball foul if any player on defense or offense enters the neutral zone. The game officials may give both teams a “courtesy” neutral zone notification to allow their players to move back behind the line of scrimmage.
3. A player who gains possession of the ball in the air is considered in bounds, as long as one foot or body part other than the hand contacts the ground in the field, while maintaining possession.
 4. Substitutions may be made during any dead ball period.
 5. The defense may not mimic the offensive team signals by trying to confuse the offensive players, while the quarterback is calling out signals to start the play. Other unfair acts would be; not returning (5) eligible players to the field of play after halftime, a team or officials time out prior to the “Ready to Play” signal by the referee. This will result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty on the Head Coach.
 6. Any official can whistle the play dead.
 7. Play is ruled “dead” when:
 - a. The ball hits the ground.
 - If the ball hits the ground as a result of a snap, backwards pitch or lateral, the ball will be placed where the ball hit the ground.
 - b. The ball-carrier’s flag is pulled.
 - c. The ball-carrier steps out of bounds
 - d. A touchdown, PAT or safety is scored.
 - e. The ball carrier’s knee, shin, leg, forearm or arm hits the ground.
 - f. The ball carrier’s flag falls out.
 - g. The receiver catches the ball while in possession of one or 0 flag(s).
 - h. The 7 second pass clock expires.
 - i. Inadvertent whistle.
 - j. Ball-carrier leaves their feet to dive, jump or hurdle a player.

NOTE: Fumbles / loss of possession: Ground contact must be made for the play to be dead at that spot. A fumble is loss of possession by a player, resulting in the ball contacting the ground.

8. If an inadvertent whistle occurs, the team in possession has two options:
 - Take the ball where the whistle blew and the down will count
 - Replay the down from the original line of scrimmage

If an IW occurs on the last play of the half or game, the offense will be awarded one untimed down and given those two options.

9. A team is allowed to use a timeout to question an official’s rule interpretation. If the official’s ruling is correct, the team will be charged with a timeout. If the rule is interpreted incorrectly, the timeout will not be charged, and the proper ruling will be enforced.

RUNNING

1. The ball is spotted where the ball is when the flag is pulled.
2. The quarterback cannot directly run with the ball across the Line of Scrimmage. The quarterback is the offensive player who receives the snap under center directly or in shotgun formation.
3. Direct handoffs, pitches, and laterals are permitted behind the line of scrimmage only. If this takes place, after the ball carrier crosses the line of scrimmage, the play is blown dead by the official. The ball shall be placed at the spot the possession lost for the next play.
 - “Center sneak” play is NOT allowed. The QB may NOT handoff, pitch or lateral the ball first to the center.
 - Any player who receives a handoff, backward pass, pitch or lateral can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage.
 - Once the ball has been handed off, in front, behind or to the side of the quarterback, or a backward pass, pitch or lateral has occurred, the 7-second passing clock is eliminated and all defensive players are eligible to rush.

Fox Valley Pop Warner – 2025 Flag Football Rules

06/19/25

4. Definition of a “Legal Handoff” – Total loss of possession directly from 1 offensive player to another.
5. Teams are not allowed to run in the “NO RUN ZONES” – (Reminder: Each offensive team approaches only TWO no-run zones each drive – one 5 yards from midfield to gain the first down and one 5 yards from the goal line to score a TD).
6. Runners are not permitted to jump, leap or hurdle, in the officials’ judgement, while advancing the ball. The play is to be blown dead, and the ball spotted where the jump, leap or hurdle occurred.
7. Ball carriers may leave their feet and the play will continue for spinning, jump cuts, QB’s passing or if there is clear indication that he/she has done so to avoid a collision with another player. The play will continue without stoppage. However, if while leaving the ground, illegal contact is made, a penalty may be enforced by the official.
8. No blocking or “screening” is allowed at any time.
9. Offensive players in close proximity of the ball carrier must stop their motion once the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage. No running with the ball carrier.
10. Flag obstruction – All jerseys MUST be tucked in before play begins. The flags must be on the player’s hips and free from obstruction. Deliberately obstructed flags will be considered flag guarding.
11. Once the ball is advanced beyond the LOS, the current ball carrier is the only player allowed to have possession of the ball until the play is dead.

PASSING

1. Only 1 forward pass, thrown from behind the line of scrimmage, is permitted each offensive play. The ball must be released prior to crossing the line of scrimmage. There can be unlimited backward passes behind the line of scrimmage.
 - Passes may be thrown backwards behind the line of scrimmage.
 - There is no intentional grounding. The quarterback may throw the ball anywhere across the line of scrimmage to avoid a sack.
 - All forward passes that do not cross the line of scrimmage are illegal forward passes, unless touched by a defender. All forward passes must go beyond the line of scrimmage.
2. Shovel passes are allowed and must be a forward pass, from behind the line of scrimmage, and received beyond the line of scrimmage.
3. The quarterback has a 7-second “pass clock”. If a pass is not thrown within 7 seconds, the play is dead, the down counts and the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage. Once the ball is handed off, pitched or lateraled behind the line of scrimmage, the 7-second rule is no longer in effect.
 - If the QB is standing in the end zone at the end of the 7-second clock, the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage (LOS).
 - If the quarterback throws the ball and then catches it, the play is dead and treated like an incomplete pass.

RECEIVING

1. All players are eligible to receive passes (including the quarterback if the ball has been handed off, pitched or lateraled behind the line of scrimmage).
2. A player must have at least one foot or other body part in bounds, contacting the ground first with possession.
3. In the case of simultaneous possession by both an offensive and defensive player, possession is awarded to the offense.
4. Interceptions are returnable. If returned for a score during regular game play, the score will be worth 6 points, 2 points if returned during conversions and/or overtime.

Fox Valley Pop Warner – 2025 Flag Football Rules

06/19/25

RUSHING THE PASSER

1. All players must be a minimum of 7 yards from the line-of-scrimmage when the ball is snapped.

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4th & 5th Grade - ONLY ONE PLAYER MAY RUSH THE QUARTERBACK - This player must raise their hand prior to the play (after the snapper touches the ball) to clearly identify themselves as a Blitz to the Officials and Offensive team. Rushers MUST rush the passer immediately after the snap. Delayed rush is NOT permitted

Players not rushing the quarterback can defend the line of scrimmage or play pass coverage.

2. Once the ball is handed off, pitched or lateraled backwards behind the line of scrimmage, all defenders may cross the line of scrimmage to defend and pull the flag.
3. A special marker, or the referee, will designate a rush line 7 yards from the line of scrimmage. Defensive players should verify they are in the correct position with the official on every play.
A legal rush is:
 - Any rush by the designated rusher 7 yards from the line of scrimmage.
 - A rush from anywhere on the field AFTER the ball has been handed off, pitched or thrown backwards by the player receiving the snap.

A penalty may be called if:

- The rusher leaves the rush line before the snap and crosses the line of scrimmage before a handoff, pitch, lateral or pass – Illegal rush (5-yards from the line of scrimmage and first down).
- Any defensive player crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped – Encroachment (5-yards from line of scrimmage and first down).
- Any defensive player not lined up at the rush line crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is passed, pitched, lateraled or handed off – Illegal rush (5-yards from the line of scrimmage and first down).
- If the offense draws the identified rusher(s) across the 7 yard marker prior to the snap of the ball, the rusher(s) CANNOT legally rush. Jumping the rush is not a penalty until the rusher crosses the line of scrimmage prior to a handoff, pitch, lateral or forward pass.

Teams are never required to rush the quarterback with the 7 second clock in effect

4. Players rushing the quarterback may attempt to block a pass; however, contact to the QB, unless ruled incidental by the official, would result in a roughing the passer penalty.
5. The offense cannot impede the rusher in any way. The rusher has the right to a clear path to the quarterback, regardless of where they line up prior to the snap. If the PATH is set pre-snap from the rusher directly to the QB. PATH does not move once the quarterback moves. If the PATH is occupied at by a moving offensive player, then it is the offensive's responsibility to avoid the rusher. Any disruption to the rusher's path and/or contact will result in an "Impeding the Rusher" penalty. If the offensive player does not move after the snap, then it's the rusher's responsibility to go around the offensive player and to avoid contact.
6. A sack occurs if the quarterback's flags are pulled behind the line of scrimmage. The ball will be spotted where possession of the ball is once the flag is pulled.
 - A 2-point Safety is awarded if a flag pull takes place in the offensive team's end zone.

FLAG PULLING

1. A legal flag pull takes place when the ball-carrier is in full possession of the ball.
2. Defenders can dive to pull flags but cannot tackle, hold or run through the ball-carrier when pulling flags.
3. It is illegal to attempt to strip or pull the ball from the ball-carriers possession at any time.
4. If a player's flag inadvertently falls off during a play while that player has possession, the player is down immediately and the play ends. The ball is placed where the flag lands.

Fox Valley Pop Warner – 2025 Flag Football Rules

06/19/25

5. If a player who has one or no flags on their belt takes possession of the ball, the play is dead at the spot on the field.
6. A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off of a player who is not in possession of the ball.
7. Flag guarding is an attempt by the ball-carrier to obstruct the defender's access to the flags by stiff arming, dropping the head, hand, ball, arm or shoulder or intentionally covering the flags with the football jersey.

FORMATIONS

1. Offenses must have a minimum of one player on the line of scrimmage (the center, if not using a QB Tee) and up to four players on the line of scrimmage. The quarterback must be off the line of scrimmage.
2. Movement simulating the snap, by a player who is set, is considered a false start.
3. The center must snap the ball with a rapid and continuous motion between his/her legs to a player in the backfield, and the ball must completely leave his/her hands (does not apply if using the QB Tee).

**** Only one player is allowed in motion when the ball is snapped. The player MUST be in motion, off the line of scrimmage. All motion must be parallel or backwards to the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.**

**** Players may shift positions on offense at any time, all players must still reset for 1 second, prior to the snap.**

UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT

1. If the field monitor or referee witnesses any acts of intentional tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, blocking or any unsportsmanlike act, the game will be stopped and the player will be ejected from the game. The decision is made at the referee's discretion. No appeals will be considered. **INTENTIONAL PHYSICAL PLAY WILL NOT BE PERMITTED!**
2. Offensive or confrontational language is NOT allowed. Officials have the right to determine offensive language. If offensive or confrontational language occurs, the officials will determine if a warning or immediate ejection is warranted.
3. Players or Coaches may not physically or verbally abuse any opponent, coach or official.
4. Ball-carriers MUST make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position.
5. Defenders must give free releases off the line of scrimmage to offensive players and are not allowed to run through the ball carrier when pulling flags. Offensive players may NOT initiate contact at the line of scrimmage with defenders.
6. Fans must also adhere to good sportsmanship as well:
 - Yell to cheer on your players, not to harass officials or other teams.
 - Comments must be clean and profanity free.
 - Compliment ALL players, not just one child or team.
7. Fans are required to keep fields safe and kids friendly and adhere to league requirements for seating:
 - Keep younger kids and equipment such as cooler, chairs and such a minimum of 10 yards off the field in the end zone area.
 - Stay in the end zone area, not between fields.
 - Dispose of ALL trash in designated trash cans.
8. **Unsportsmanlike conduct penalties:**
 - Defense + 10 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
 - Offense – 10 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
 - Two (2) unsportsmanlike penalties on any player or coach in a game result in a disqualification and may lead to additional discipline.

Fox Valley Pop Warner – 2025 Flag Football Rules

06/19/25

PENALTIES

General

1. The referee will administer all penalties.
2. The officials will determine incidental contact that may result from normal run of play.
3. All penalties will be assessed from the line of scrimmage, except as noted (Spot fouls)
4. Only the team captain or head coach may ask the referee questions about rule clarification and interpretations. Players may not question calls.
5. Games or halves may not end on a defensive penalty unless the offense declines it.
6. Penalties are assessed live ball then dead ball. Live ball penalties must be assessed before play is considered complete.
7. Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal yardage when the penalty yardage is more than half the distance to the goal.
8. Spot fouls administered in the end zone: Defensive (Ball on one-yard line, first down) / Offensive (Safety)

Defensive spot fouls	
Defensive pass interference	Automatic first down.
Holding/Illegal Contact	+5 yards and automatic first down
Stripping	+5 yards and automatic first down
Offensive spot fouls	
Screening or blocking	-5 yards and loss of down
Charging	-5 yards and loss of down
Flag guarding	-5 yards and loss of down
Holding/Illegal Contact	-5 yards and loss of down
Defensive penalties	
Defensive unnecessary roughness	+10 yards and automatic first down
Defensive unsportsmanlike conduct	+10 yards and automatic first down
Offside / illegal substitution	+5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Illegal rush (Starting rush from inside 7-yard marker)	+5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Illegal flag pull (Before the receiver has the ball)	+5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Roughing the passer	+5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Taunting	+10 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Offensive penalties	
Offensive unnecessary roughness	-10 yards and loss of down
Offensive unsportsmanlike conduct	-10 yards and loss of down
Offside / false start / illegal substitution	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Illegal forward pass (any pass received or lands behind the line of scrimmage or throwing a pass after crossing the line of scrimmage)	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Offensive pass interference	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Illegal motion (more than one person moving)	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Delay of game	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Impeding the rusher	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Illegal procedure	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Taunting	-10 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down

Fox Valley Pop Warner – 2025 Flag Football Rules

06/19/25

Terminology

Boundary Lines	The outer lines marking the playing field’s perimeter, including sidelines and end zones.
Line-of-Scrimmage	(LOS) an imaginary line running through the point of the football and across the width of the field.
Line-to-Gain	The line the offense must reach for a first down.
Rush Line	An imaginary line 7 yards from the from the line of scrimmage on the defense’s side.
Offense	The team with possession of the ball.
Defense	The team trying to stop the offense and regain possession.
Passer	Any offensive player who throws the ball, not just the quarterback.
Rusher	The defensive player who starts from the rush line and tries to pressure the quarterback by either pulling flags or blocking passes.
Live Ball	Refers to the period of time that the play is in action. Generally used in regards to penalties. Live ball penalties are considered part of the play and must be enforced before the down is considered complete.
Dead Ball	The time between plays when no action is occurring.
Whistle	Official’s signal to stop play for timeouts, end of plays, or game periods.
Inadvertent Whistle	An official’s whistle that is sounded in error.
Charging	When a ball-carrier illegally runs directly into a set defensive player. This includes leading with the head or making contact with shoulder, forearm, or chest.
Flag Guarding	An illegal act when the ball-carrier tries to block defenders from pulling their flags – whether by stiff-arming, dropping their elbow/head or using the ball itself as a shield.
Shovel Pass	A legal forward pass across the LOS (underhand, backhand or by pushing the ball forward).
Lateral	A backward or parallel toss of the ball by the ball-carrier.
Unsportsmanlike Conduct	Confrontational or offensive behavior or language.