

Fox Valley Pop Warner – 2023 Flag Football Rules

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.

GAME

1. The HOME team will start with the ball in the FIRST half. The VISITOR team will start with the ball in the SECOND half.
2. The offense starts with the ball on the 40-yardline and has six downs to score. If the offense fails to score the opposing team will take offensive possession starting with the ball on the 40-yardline. Offensive drives are always in the same direction.
3. 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).

EQUIPMENT

1. Player must bring their FVPW supplied NFL FLAG belts.
2. All players must wear FLAG belts and mouth guards at all times while on the playing fields.
3. NFL FLAG jerseys must be worn.
4. NFL FLAG footballs will be provided by FVPW. Team footballs are not allowed.
5. Players must wear shoes. Molded rubber cleats may be worn. However, cleats with exposed metal are never allowed.
6. Players may tape their forearms, hands and fingers. Players may wear gloves, elbow pads and kneepads. Braces with exposed metals are not allowed.
7. Players must remove all jewelry, hats and do-rags. Winter beanies are allowed.
8. Players' jerseys must be tucked into shorts or pants if they hang below the belt line.
9. We recommend players wear NFL FLAG shorts or pants that do not have pockets. Shorts or pants with belt loops or pockets must be taped. Games will not be delayed for a player to tape up pockets.
10. Flag belts cannot be the same color as shorts or pants.

FIELD

1. The flag football field is 40 yards long and 30 yards wide.
2. No-run zones are in place to prevent teams from conducting power run plays. While in the no-run zone (a 5-yard imaginary zone which starts 5 yards from the goal line), teams cannot run the ball in any fashion. All plays must be pass plays, even with a handoff when starting within the No-Run Zone.
3. Stepping on the boundary line is considered out-of-bounds.

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.

TIMING

1. The games are played with two 24 minute halves using a running clock. The clock only stops for halftime.
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. Officials can stop the clock at their discretion.

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6. In the event of an injury, the clock will stop then restart when the injured player is removed from the field of play.
7. 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: 1 point PAT is pass only; 2 point PAT can be run or pass
3. **Safety:** 2 points
Note 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.
4. Extra points that are returned are 2 points.
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 8 downs to score a TD
 - c. If the winning team's lead falls below 28 points, the game rules go back to normal rules.
7. Forfeits are scored 28-0 for the winning team.
8. The officials and scorekeeper must sign the score sheet.

COACHES

1. Coaches are expected to adhere to FVPW & NFL FLAG philosophizes, coaching guidelines and code of conduct.
2. Only two coaches per team are allowed on the sidelines. All other must be behind the perimeter boundary lines.

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.
It is an automatic dead ball foul if any player on defense or offense enters the neutral zone. In regard to the neutral zone, the official 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 in the air is considered inbounds as long as one foot comes down in the field of play.
4. 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. This will result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty.
5. Substitutions may be made on any dead ball.
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 bad snap, the ball is then 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 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 no flag(s).
 - h. The 7 second pass clock expires.
 - i. Inadvertent whistle.

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NOTE: There are no fumbles. The ball becomes a dead ball. (If the ball is fumbled forwards then it will be spotted where the ball carrier lost possession.)

8. If an inadvertent whistle occurs with no time left on the clock at halftime or end of game, the offense will have one untimed down. The offense has two options:
 - a. Take the ball where it was when the whistle blew, and the down is consumed.
 - b. Replay the down from the original line of scrimmage.

RUNNING

1. The ball is spotted where the ball is when the flag is pulled.
2. The quarterback cannot directly run with the ball. The quarterback must handoff or pass the ball. During a play, after the quarterback has handoff or passed the ball, the quarterback becomes eligible to become a pass receiver or running back. The quarterback is the offensive player who receives the snap.
3. Only direct handoffs behind the line of scrimmage are permitted. Handoffs may be in front, behind or to the side of the offensive player but must be behind the line of scrimmage. The offense may use multiple handoffs.

“Center sneak” play is not allowed. The QB is not allowed to handoff to the center on the first handoff of the play.
4. Absolutely NO laterals of any kind.
5. The No-run Zone starts 5 yards before the end zone. The No-Run zone is designed to avoid short-yardage power-running situations. Teams are not allowed to run into these zones if the subsequent line-of-scrimmage is before the No-Run zone.
6. Any player who receives a handoff can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage.
7. Once the ball has been handed off in front, behind, or to the side of the quarterback, all defensive players are eligible to rush.
8. Runners may not leave their feet to advance the ball. Diving, leaping or jumping to avoid a flag pull is considered flag guarding.
9. Spinning/Jump Cuts are allowed, but players cannot leave their feet to avoid a flag pull. Players spinning out of control will be called for flag guarding.
10. Runners may leave their feet if there is a clear indication that he/she has done so to avoid collision with another player without a flag guarding penalty enforced.
11. No blocking or “screening” is allowed at any time.
12. Offensive players without the ball must stop their motion once the ball has crossed the line-of-scrimmage. No running with the ball-carrier.
13. Flag obstruction – All jerseys MUST be tucked in before play begins. The flags must be on the players hips and free from obstruction. Deliberately obstructed flags will be considered flag guarding.

PASSING

1. All passes must be from behind the line of scrimmage, thrown forward and received beyond the line of scrimmage.

All passes that do not cross the line-of-scrimmage, whether received or not, are illegal forward passes. The quarterback may throw the ball away to avoid a sack. Pass must go beyond the line of scrimmage.
2. Shovel passes are allowed but must be received beyond the line of scrimmage.
3. The quarterback has a seven-second “pass clock”. If a pass is not thrown within the seven seconds, the play is dead, the down is consumed and the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage. Once the ball is handed off, the 7-second rule is no longer in effect.

If a 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).

RECEIVING

1. All players are eligible to receive passes (including the quarterback if the ball has been handed off behind the line of scrimmage).
2. Only one player is allowed in motion at a time. All motion must be parallel to the line of scrimmage and no motion is permitted toward the line of scrimmage.
3. A player must have at least one foot in bounds when making a reception.

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4. In the case of simultaneous possession by both an offensive and defensive player, possession is awarded to the offense.
5. Interceptions are returnable on conversions after touchdowns (2 points).

RUSHING THE PASSER

1. All players must be a minimum of seven yards from the line-of-scrimmage when the ball is snapped. Any number of players can rush the quarterback. Players not rushing the quarterback can defend the line of scrimmage or play pass coverage.
2. Once the ball is handed off, the seven-yard rule is no longer in effect and all defenders may go beyond the line of scrimmage.
3. A special marker, or the referee, will designate a rush line seven yards from the line of scrimmage. Defensive players should verify they are in the correct position with the official on every play.
 - a. A legal rush is:
 - i. Any rush from a point of 7-yards from the defensive line of scrimmage.
 - ii. A rush from anywhere on the field AFTER the ball has been handed off by the quarterback.
 - b. A penalty may be called if:
 - i. The rusher leaves the rush line before the snap crosses the line of scrimmage Before a handoff or pass – illegal rush (5-yards from the line of scrimmage and first down).
 - ii. Any defensive player crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped - offside (5-yards from line of scrimmage and first down).
 - iii. Any defensive player not lined up at the rush line crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is passed or handed off – illegal rush (5-yards from the line of scrimmage before the ball is passed or handed off – illegal rush (5-yards from the line of scrimmage and first down).
 - iv. If the offense draws the rusher(s) to jump the seven-yard marker prior to the snap of the ball, that rusher(s) CANNOT rush during that play. However, any other defender that is seven yards back may rush instead. Jumping the rush is not a penalty until the rusher crosses the line of scrimmage prior to the handoff or passed ball.
 - c. Special circumstances:
 - i. Teams are not required to rush the quarterback with the seven second clock in effect.
 - ii. Teams are not required to identify their rusher before the play.
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 or line” is occupied 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. A Safety is awarded if the sack 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 the play, the player is down immediately upon possession of the ball and the play ends. The ball is placed where the flag lands.
5. A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off of a player who is not in possession of the ball.
6. 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, arm or shoulder or intentionally covering the flags with the football jersey.

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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.
 - a. One player at a time may go in motion 1-yard behind and parallel to the line of scrimmage.
 - b. No motion is allowed toward the line of scrimmage.
2. Movement by a player who is set or a player who runs toward the line of scrimmage while in motion 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).

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. FOUL PLAY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED!
2. Offensive or confrontational language is not allowed. Officials have the right to determine offensive language. If offensive or confrontational language occurs, the referee will give one warning. If it continues, the player or players will be ejected from the game.
3. Players 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 are not allowed to run through the ball-carrier when pulling flags.
6. Fans must also adhere to good sportsmanship as well:
 - a. Yell to cheer on your players, not to harass officials or other teams.
 - b. Keep comments clean and profanity free.
 - c. Compliment ALL players, not just one child or team
7. Fans are required to keep fields safe and kids friendly:
 - a. Keep younger kids and equipment such as cooler, chairs and such a minimum of 10 yards off the field in the end zone area.
 - b. Dispose of ALL trash in designated trash cans.
8. Unsportsmanlike conduct penalties:
 - a. Defense + 10 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
 - b. Offense – 10 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down

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PENALTIES

General

1. The referee will call all penalties.
2. Referees 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 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. In the last 2 minutes of the game offensive offside/false start will result in LOSS OF A DOWN.

Defensive spot fouls	
Defensive pass interference	Automatic first down.
Holding	+5 yards and automatic first down
Stripping	+10 yards and automatic first down
Offensive spot fouls	
Screening, blocking or running with the ball	-10 yards and loss of down
Charging	-10 yards and loss of down
Flag guarding	-10 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	+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	+5 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	-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

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Terminology

Boundary Lines	The outer perimeter lines around the field. They include the sidelines and back of the end zone lines.
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 pass to get a first down or score.
Rush Line	An imaginary line running across the width of the field seven yards (into the defensive side) from the line of scrimmage.
Offense	The team with possession of the ball.
Defense	The team opposing the offense to prevent it from advancing the ball.
Passer	The offensive player that throws the ball and may or may not be the quarterback.
Rusher	The defensive player assigned to rush the quarterback to prevent him/her from passing the ball by pulling his/her flag or by blocking the pass.
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	Refers to the period of time immediately before or after a play.
Whistle	Sound made by official using a whistle that signifies the end of the play or a stop in the action for a timeout, halftime or the end of the game.
Inadvertent Whistle	Official's whistle that is performed in error.
Charging	An illegal movement of the ball-carrier directly at a defensive player who has established position on the field. This included lowering the head or initiating contact with a shoulder, forearm or the chest.
Flag Guarding	An illegal act by the ball-carrier to prevent a defender from pulling the ball-carrier's flags by stiff arm, lowering elbow or head or by blocking access to the runners flags with a hand, arm or ball.
Shovel Pass	A legal forward pass across the LOS underhand, backhand or by pushing the ball forward.
Lateral	A backward or sideways toss of the ball by the ball-carrier.
Unsportsmanlike Conduct	A rude, confrontational or offensive behavior or language.