



Metro South Youth Football League (MSYFL)

4th Grade Tackle-Transition Rules & Regulations

Rules **HIGHLIGHTED are null following the transition to tackle**

(Updated 05/21/2025)

1. Organization

1.1. Please refer to the MSYFL By-Laws and Governing Committee for all governance rules.

2. Registration and Player Eligibility

2.1. The player must meet the participation guidelines of their home association.

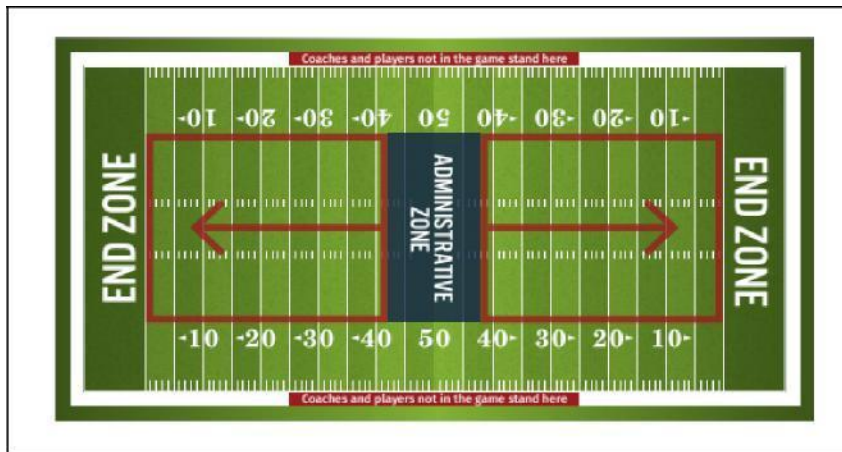
2.2. Based on home association rules, players must play at the grade level they are currently enrolled in (for the fall) or above.

2.3. Weight of a player: Players weighing **95+ lbs** at the beginning of the season are not allowed to advance the ball from behind the line of scrimmage or lead-block from behind the line of scrimmage. These players will be identified by a stripe on their helmets, running from the front to the back.

3. Team Size, Game Time & Game Play

3.1. Number of Players: 7 vs 7

3.2. Field Size: The playing field is 40 yards x 35 1/3 yards. The direction of play is from the traditional 40-yard line toward the end zone.



3.3. First downs, down markers, and the “chain gang” are administered according to the MSHSL rules. The home team supplies equipment and volunteers for the “chain gang.”

- 3.4. **Penalties:** The purpose of developmental youth football is to educate and foster a fun playing environment. All penalties should be educational for players, coaches, referees, and spectators.
- 3.4.1.1. Because of this and the size of the field, all penalties will be enforced at 5 or 10 yards.
- 3.4.1.2. Penalties on the offense called between the 40-yard line and the end zone in which yardage is lost, even if limited in enforcement by the 40-yard line, are enforced as written in terms of down lost or replayed.
- 3.4.1.3. Penalties on the offense that are called and accepted on or behind the 40-yard line result in a loss of down. A penalty that would typically include a loss of down would not result in a second loss of down on the same play.

4. Game Play

- 4.1. Teams will play **two games** of Tacklebar and then transition to tackle football.
- 4.2. Each possession starts with the ball on the 40-yard line, regardless of whether there is a score, a turnover, or a turnover on downs.
- 4.3. The offense has four (4) downs to reach the line-to-gain (first down marker) or score.
- 4.4. An interception or fumble recovery by the defense is a dead ball, and possession changes to the recovering team on the 40-yard line. Play is allowed to continue for fumbles recovered by the offense.
- 4.5. After each play, the ball is spotted in the middle of the field. Hash marks are not used.

4.6. Equipment

- 4.6.1. Only clear (non-tinted or shaded) helmet visors are permitted.

5. Scoring

- 5.1. A **Touchdown** is worth six (6) points.
- 5.2. All **Point-After-Attempts** are attempted through a run or pass try. Coaches can choose one (1) point from the 3-yard line or two (2) points from the 5-yard line.²
- 5.3. **Celebrations** - players are allowed to celebrate a score; however, at no time should the celebration be directed at the opposing team or taunting

6. Game Time

- 6.1. Four (4) quarters of twelve (12) minutes running time. During running time, the clock does not stop except for time-outs, injuries, penalties, touchdowns, and possession changes.
- 6.2. Stop time applies during the last two (2) minutes of each half. During stop time, the clock stops for timeouts, injuries, penalties, touchdowns, incomplete passes, first downs, change of possession, and out-of-bounds. However, if a team leads by 28 points with 4:00 minutes left in the fourth quarter, there is no stoppage of time (except for injuries and penalties).
- 6.3. **Time Outs:** Each team will get two (2) timeouts per half.
- 6.4. **Half Time:** Teams are allowed two (2) minutes between quarters and a five (5) minute halftime.
- 6.5. **Overtime:** No Overtime - if a game is tied at the end of regulation, the game is recorded as a tie.
- 6.6. **Play Clock:** Referees will maintain a 35-second clock from the referee's set of the ball to the snap (The delay of the game is a 5-yard penalty).
- 6.7. No "Hurry Up" offense. The offense and defense should have a reasonable amount of time to get set (10 seconds).

7. Formations

- 7.1. **Balanced Offensive Line-** Each play must include three (3) offensive players on the LOS. They must be; a center, two guards, on either side of the center. (G-C-G)
 - 7.1.1. The center and guards are ineligible for the first touch as the receiver of a pass, regardless of the numbers on their jerseys.
 - 7.1.2. **Stance** - The Offensive Line must be set in a three-point stance.
 - 7.1.3. **Splits** - Offensive Line (G to G) splits must be 6"-18" between players.
- 7.2. **Offensive Backs and Receivers**
 - 7.2.1. The remaining players may line up anywhere in the formation, as long as they are one (1) yard off the line of scrimmage (LOS) and there are no more than two (2) players on either side of the centerline.
 - 7.2.2. **"Motion"** is not allowed. All players must be set (not moving in a football stance) before the snap of the ball. Since the defense can NOT blitz, this movement would create an unfair advantage for the offense.

7.3. Balanced Defensive Line- Each play must include two (2) defensive players on the LOS. They must be Defensive Tackles on either side of the center line. (DT-*ball*-DT)

7.3.1. **Cover Center**: No defensive player covers the offensive center on the LOS. (see rule 7.4.1 for rules about linebackers, which MUST be 4 yards off the line of scrimmage).

7.3.2. **Helmet-to-helmet (DT)**: Defensive Tackles on the line of scrimmage must line up helmet to helmet with an Offensive Guard in a three—or four-point stance. This means no lining up in the gaps.

7.4. Defensive Backs (ILB, OLB, C, S)

7.4.1. **Linebackers** must be 4 yards off the LOS. An inside linebacker may be in the center but must be 4 yards off the LOS.

7.4.2. **Corners** must be 4 yards off the LOS.

7.4.3. **Safeties (S)** must be 7 yards off the LOS. Except inside a team's 10-yard line, safeties line up 1 yard behind the deepest linebacker.

8. Offense Play Rules

8.1. **Cadence** - the quarterback shall not attempt to draw the defense offside using a hard, irregular count or bobbing. The same cadence shall be used throughout the game and not changed. (5-Yard Penalty).

8.2. **Snap** - Teams may use an “under center” snap or “shotgun” style. [See: *Snap Rule 11.1.8*].

8.3. **Direct Snaps Prohibited**- Quarterback sneaks (QB running the ball between the guards after receiving the snap) are prohibited because the defense cannot have players aligned over the center or in the center-guard gaps. This rule also applies to a wildcat play (where the ball is snapped directly to an offensive back or receiver).

8.4. **Offensive Fumble** - All backfield fumbles or dropped/missed snaps are live balls.

8.5. All **false starts** and **offsides** fouls are dead-ball fouls. Play stops immediately when these fouls occur.

8.6. No **blocking below the waist**. (10-Yard Penalty) [See: *Blocking Rules - 11.1.3, 11.1.4, & 11.1.5*].

8.7. If a Tacklebar or a harness falls off, the ball carrier is down at the spot.

8.8. **Charging** – a ball carrier may NEVER lower their head to run through or charge a defensive player. (10-Yard Penalty) [See: *Intentional use of Helmet Rule - 11.1.7*].

8.9. No bar guarding - the ball carrier cannot move or cover their bars to prevent the defense from accessing them (the bars). This does not prevent legal football moves such as “stiff arms” or movements to avoid a defensive play.

9. Defense Play Rules

9.1. No Blitzing - No blitzes are allowed.

9.1.1. The **defensive line** (DTs and DEs (see 7.3.3 above)) on the LOS can penetrate (**rush**) upon the snap.

9.1.2. **Run Plays:** Linebackers, safeties, and cornerbacks can flow to the ball naturally after a handoff (or fake) is made, but predetermining penetration to a specific gap is illegal.

9.1.3. **Pass Plays**—Linebackers, safeties, and cornerbacks cannot rush the quarterback and must remain behind the line of scrimmage in pass coverage. Once the quarterback leaves the box (G to G), executes a play-action, or throws a pass, any defensive player can rush.

9.1.4. *Rule application:* The restriction on blitzing is intended to encourage skill development within the passing game and allow young players to execute a successful handoff with limited penetration.

9.1.5. *Rule enforcement:* Illegal blitzes by a linebacker or defensive back shall be enforced as an illegal procedure foul and a five-yard live ball penalty. If continued blitzing is determined to be a product of coach encouragement, a 10-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty can occur.

9.2. Engagement -

9.2.1. **Defensive Linemen** (DT, DE) must engage their opposing player before moving toward the ball carrier. “Engage” means contact with two hands pushed into the opposing player's chest and/or shoulder area.

9.2.2. *Rule application:* The requirement to engage is to encourage skill development. After engagement, the defensive line player can flow toward the ball, including the a-gap (note: this league does not restrict running through the a-gap, so defensive players can defend all gaps after engagement has been made).

9.3. **Tackling** - [See: *Illegal Personal Contact Rule - 11.1.6*].

9.3.1. The “Wrap and Rip” technique is recommended. The defender breaks down, initiates contact, wraps the ball carrier, and rips Tacklebar. This simulates the latest recommended shoulder tackling technique. It is not a penalty if the ball carrier inadvertently goes to the ground during this action. However, contact that deliberately takes the ball carrier to the ground with force may be penalized.

9.3.2. Tackling a player to the ground without showing an attempt to pull a bar is illegal. The first violation (unless it is violent and unnecessary roughness) is a warning; subsequent violations are penalties. (10-Yard, possible ejection if behavior continues)

9.3.3. Players may never leave their feet to launch or dive into another player. (10-Yard Penalty).

9.3.4. No throwing players to the ground. (10-Yard Penalty)[See: *Contact Rule - 11.1.6*].

9.3.5. No helmet-initiated contact. (10-Yard Penalty)[See: *use of Helmet Rule - 11.1.7*].

9.3.6. When one tacklebar is removed, a ball carrier is down. Defensive players should hold the bar in the air until the whistle blows.

9.4. All **false starts** and **offsides** are dead-ball fouls. Play stops immediately when these fouls occur.

10. **Special Teams**

10.1. There are no Kickoffs or Punts.

11. **Emphasized MSHSL Rules** - Minnesota State High School League (“MSHSL”) rules will be followed except as noted above and below. The MSHSL rules apply to all players, coaches, parents, and referees.

11.1. **Illegal Block-Clipping** (Rule 9-Sec.3-Art.5): A player shall not clip, and there is no free blocking zone. All lines must match up head-to-head or double team block and be above the waist. Clipping Rule 2-Sec.3-Art 1&2) Clipping is: charging or falling into the back or across the back of the leg(s) of an opponent who is not a runner or pretending to be a runner, or pushing by use of hands or arms into an opponent’s back. Such cases shall not be ruled clipping unless the official sees the initial contact. When in doubt, or the opponent turns their back, or the block is from the side, it is not clipping if the opponent was able to see the blocker. (10-yd penalty)

11.2. **Illegal Blocking-Below the Waist** (Rule 9-Sec.3-Art.2): A player shall not block an opponent below the waist (10-yd penalty)

11.3. **Illegal Blocking-Chop Block** (Rule 9-Sec.3-Art.6): Blocking by offense or defense is illegal when it is a chop block. Rule 2- Sec.3-Art.9 Chop block is a block at the knees or below the waist to an opponent who is in contact with a teammate of the blocker. (10-yd penalty)

- 11.4. **Illegal Personal Contact** (Rule 9-Sec.4-Art.2): No player shall: b. Charge into or throw an opponent to the ground after the player is obviously out of play or after the ball is dead, either in or out of bounds. In other words, players shall not HEADHUNT 30 yards away from the play, and coaches should teach their kids that such activity is illegal and dangerous. c. Pile on any player who is lying on the ground. i. Butt block, face tackle, or spear. (Butt Block is a blow driven directly into an opponent with the face mask, frontal area, or top of the helmet as the primary point of contact). (10-yd penalty)
- 11.5. **Intentionally use the helmet** to butt or ram an opponent (Rule 9-Sec.4-Art.7): A defensive (and offensive) player shall not use their hands to strike (the opponent's) head. (10-yd penalty)
- 11.6. **Snap Rule** (7-Sec.1a): The snapper may be over the ball...and no part of their person, other than a hand(s) on the ball, may be beyond the foremost point of the ball. b. The snapper may lift the ball for lateral rotation but may not rotate end-for-end or change the ball's location. c. The snapper may not remove both hands from the ball, make a false snap or fail to pause before the snap. d. An act intended to cause the defense to encroach. (5-yd penalty)
- 11.7. **Assist the Runner** (Rule 9-Sec. 1): An offensive player shall not push, pull or lift the runner to assist their forward progress. (5-yd penalty)
- 11.8. **Fighting** - Illegal Personal Contact (Rule 9-Sec.4-Art.1): No player or non-player shall fight (striking, kicking, kneeing, and intentionally contacting an official) (10-yd penalty & disqualification)
- 11.9. **Neutral Zone** (Rule 2-Sec.27): The Neutral Zone is as wide as the length of the ball and is expanded following the snap up to 2 yards on the defensive side of the line of scrimmage.
- 11.10. **Inadvertent Whistle** (Rule 4.-Sec.2-Art.3): During a down, or during a down in which the penalty for a foul is declined, if an inadvertent whistle occurs during the following, the down shall be replayed; a. A legal forward pass or snap is in flight, b. The ball is loose following a backward pass, fumble, or illegal forward pass.

11.11. Pass Interference

- 11.11.1. Pass Interference restrictions only apply beyond the neutral zone and only if the forward pass crosses the neutral zone.
- 11.11.2. Pass interference restrictions begin for the offense at the snap and for the defense at the release of the pass. It is forward-pass interference if any player, offense, or defense that is beyond the neutral zone interferes with an eligible opponent's opportunity to move toward, catch or bat the pass. (15 yards from the previous spot and automatic first down if by the defense or 15 yards from previous spot and loss of down if by offense)
- 11.11.3. It is not pass interference if unavoidable contact occurs when two or more eligible players make a simultaneous, bona fide attempt to move toward, catch or bat the pass.
- 11.11.4. It is not pass interference if the offense immediately makes contact with the defense and the contact does not continue beyond the neutral zone.

11.12. **Noncontact Unsportsmanlike Conduct (Rule 9-Sec.5):** Baiting, taunting, insignias worn that engenders ill will; embarrass, ridicule, or demean based on race, gender, religion, or national origin; profanity, insulting, language or gestures; spiking or kicking the ball, throw it in the air; any delayed excessive or prolonged act by which a player attempts to focus attention upon themselves. (10 yards & disqualification if flagrant, and if the 2nd unsportsmanlike foul results in disqualification)

11.13. **Noncontact Unsportsmanlike Conduct by Nonplayers (Rule 9-Sec.8-Art.1):** No coach, substitute, trainer, or another team attendant shall act unsportsmanlike. Examples are, but are not limited to: Using Profanity, insulting or vulgar language or gestures, attempting to influence a decision by an official, and disrespectfully addressing an official. (10-yard penalty and, if flagrant, disqualification and ejection. The second unsportsmanlike foul with a 10-yard penalty results in disqualification. Failure to comply, the referee may forfeit the game.)

11.14. **Electronic equipment on the field** - At no time shall any coach, player, or spectator have any electronic communication or recording equipment. This includes a video camera, radios, computers, and any other equipment that can be used for communication between players, coaches, and spectators. Personal cell phones are allowed on the sidelines but are not to be used to facilitate communication for the purposes of coaching in the game. Anyone violating this rule will be removed from the game and reviewed by the MSYFL Executive Committee for further action. **Parents, or teams videotaping the game must do so from at least 7 yards back from the sideline or endzone and cannot review the tape with any players or coaches during the game.**

11.15. **Parent/Spectator Conduct** (Rule 9-Sec.9-Art.1): A player, nonplayer, or person not following the rules shall not hinder play by an unfair act, which has no specific rule. (The referee enforces any equitable penalty, including the score award. Warnings are recommended but optional.)

11.16. **Sportsmanship recommendation:** When leading by 21 points, it is recommended that players be replaced with skill-positioned players when they are able.

12. Sources

12.1. USA Football: <https://fdm.usafootball.com/game-types/limited-contact>.

12.2. USA Football: <https://assets.usafootball.com/documents/rookietackle/resources/ADM-Junior-and-Senior-Rule-book.pdf>.

12.3. MN State High School League: <https://www.mshsl.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/football-2021-22-rpb0.pdf>