

HAWKS

Flag Football Rule Book

Fourth Edition



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GAME

- At the start of each game, captains from both teams shall meet at midfield for the coin toss to determine who shall start with the ball. The visiting team shall call the toss.
- The winner of the coin toss has the choice of offense or defense. The loser of the coin toss has the choice of direction. Teams may not choose to defer to the second half.
- The offensive team takes possession of the ball at its 5-yard line and has four (4) plays to cross midfield. Once a team crosses midfield, they have four (4) plays to score a touchdown.
- If the offensive team fails to cross midfield in three plays, they have the option to attempt to make the first down or punt. If the offensive team does not make the first down, the opposition will receive the ball where the 4th down play was called dead. Punting the ball will result in a change of possession and the other team will get the ball on its own 5-yard line.
- Teams change sides after the first half. Possession changes to the team that started the game on defense.

RAIN OUTS

- At the first sign of inclement weather, league representatives and/or game officials will decide whether to delay or suspend the game(s). The safety and welfare of participants and fans is paramount. Any sign of lightning in the area will delay the game for 30 minutes from the last sign of lightning.
- If first half is complete and inclement weather disrupts play during the first 10 minutes of 2nd half, game details will be recorded, and play will resume on a different day where the game left off.
- If inclement weather disrupts game play in the 2nd half with under ten minutes remaining, the game will end and will count as full game played.
- All rescheduled rainouts are at the sole discretion of the flag director.

EQUIPMENT

- All players must wear identical team uniforms. Player names may be added to the backs of the jerseys at the team's cost. All players' jerseys must adhere to the same modifications. No additional alterations allowed.
- Players must wear football cleats.
- Players must wear mouthpieces.
- Players must remove all watches, earrings and any other jewelry that the officials deem hazardous.
- Players' jerseys must be tucked into the pants if they hang below the belt line.
- Pants or shorts with belt loops or pockets must be taped.

- Wrapping, tying, or in any way securing flags to the uniform or belt is illegal. Penalty: 10 yards. Repeat offenders will be ejected from the game.

FIELD

- The field dimensions are 30 yards by 70 yards with two 10-yard end zones, and a midfield line-to-gain. No-Run Zones precede each line-to-gain by 5 yards.
- No-Run Zones are in place to prevent teams from conducting power run plays. While in the No-Run Zones (a 5-yard imaginary zone before midfield and before the end zone), teams cannot run the ball in any fashion. All plays must be pass plays. Handoffs are not allowed.
- Stepping on the boundary line is considered out of bounds.

TEAM FORMATION

- Teams are formed via player and coach requests as well as a blind draft. Each team is allowed a max of 5 coach/player requests. This includes coaches' kids. A blind draft will be conducted by the Flag Director to fill the remaining roster slots until all teams have reached the maximum number of players.
- Assessments are held for all players that registered without a player or coach request. If assessments are unable to occur due to weather, teams will be formed via a blind draft.
- Due to COVID-19, assessments will not be held as it is more difficult to social distance.
- When assessments can be conducted, all teams will be formed via the official draft following assessments. All drafted players must be registered and in attendance at assessments. All players absent from assessments and late registrations will be blind drafted. The blind draft will be conducted by the Flag Director and all placements will occur in the order of draft selection until the teams have reached the maximum number of players.
- The maximum number of players per team will be determined based on the total number of players per age group. All rosters must be updated to reflect jersey numbers assigned to players; updated rosters must be submitted to the director prior to the first game.
- Each team is allowed one coach and one assistant coach. As such, each team may begin with a maximum of two players to include the coach's and the assistant coach's child.

PLAYER PARTICIPATION

- Only players registered with the Spring Hill Hawks Youth Sports Organization will be allowed to participate. Players must wear the provided Spring Hill Hawks uniform.
- Every player on a team at the game must play and must play both offense and defense. Coaches should make every effort to ensure that all players have equal field time.

ROSTERS

- Teams must start a game 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.
- If teams are faced with a forfeit situation due to lack of players, the team can add one (1) player from the division immediately below. Extreme caution must be used in determining child's ability to play up in older age group.

BORROWED PLAYERS

- If teams are faced with a forfeit situation due to lack of players, the team is allowed to add one (1) player from the division immediately below.
- Borrowed players may not play in every down of the game unless needed to have the minimum number of players on the field for the age group.
- Teams may only borrow up to 2 players in order to meet the minimum number of players on the field.
- Extreme caution must be used in determining child's ability to play up in older age group.
- All borrowed players must be approved by the league director.

TIMING AND OVERTIME

- Games are played on a 40-minute continuous clock with two 20-minute halves. The clock stops only for coach timeouts, referee timeouts, or player injury.
- Extra point attempts are only considered untimed downs if the clock has expired. If a timeout before an extra point attempt is ran, the clock will resume at the snap of the ball.
- If a defensive penalty occurs at the end of the first half or game, the offense will be awarded a untimed down. If the offense scores, they will be able to attempt a PAT.
- Halftime will last five minutes.
- Each time the ball is spotted, a team has 30 seconds to snap the ball (45 seconds for 6U division). Teams will receive one warning before a delay-of-game penalty is enforced.
- Each team has two 30-second time outs per half.
- Officials can stop the clock at their discretion.
- In the event of an injury the clock will stop and then restart when the injured player is removed from the field of play.

- If the score is tied at the end of 40 minutes, overtime rules apply.
- OT format is as follows:
 - Each possession starts at midfield.
 - First possession choice goes to the winner of regulation coin toss.
 - Each team gets a minimum of one possession to score. After each team has had one possession, possessions continue until there is a winner. (Example: Team A and Team B do not score on their first possession. Team A scores on its second possession and scores its 2 PAT (Point After Touchdown); Team B must score on their next possession AND score a 2 PAT in order for another round of possessions to begin.)
 - Coaches may choose the direction they want to go in. Both teams can go in the same direction.
 - All regulation period rules and penalties are in effect.
 - There are no time-outs.
- Multiple OT periods:
 - First OT period – shown above:
 - Scoring teams can go for 1- or 2-point PAT.
 - Second OT Period:
 - Scoring teams must go for 2-point PAT.
 - If there is no winner after the second overtime, the game will be considered a tie.

SCORING

- Touchdown: 6 points
- PAT (Point After Touchdown): A team that scores a touchdown must declare whether it wishes to attempt a 1-pt. conversion (from the 5-yard line) or a 2-pt. conversion (from the 12-yard line).
 - 1 point (5-yard line) Pass only.
 - 2 points (12-yard line) Can be run or pass.
 - Interceptions can be returned for 1 or 2 points.
- Safety: 2 points
 - A Safety occurs when the ball carrier is declared down in his/her own end zone. They can be called down when their flags are pulled by a defensive player, their flag falls out, they step out of bounds or they hit the ground with their knee or arm.

- A Safety also occurs when there is an offensive penalty in the end zone.
- A Safety occurs when the ball lands in the endzone after a snap.
- Mercy Rule:
 - A mercy rule is in effect when a team has achieved a lead of 21 points. Once the game has reached the Mercy Rule, the leading team's defense is not allowed to blitz. Penalty: 10 yards.
 - The mercy rule is no longer in effect once the lead is less than 21 points.

COACHES

- All head and assistant coaches must complete and submit USA Flag Certification prior to the first game of the season. Directions will be sent by the Flag Director.
- All head and assistant coaches must submit for a background check prior to the first game of the season. Directions will be sent by the Flag Director.
- One coach per team is allowed on the field to direct players in the 6U division only. All coaches must move back at least 5 yards from the QB before the snap of the ball.
- Once the ball is snapped, coaches on the field are not allowed to coach or direct players in any manner. Doing so will result in a 5-yard penalty. This means that the coaches on the field **ARE NOT** allowed to say anything to the players once the ball is snapped.
- All discussions with referees about calls will be conducted in a respectful manner. Shouting or arguing will result in a 10-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty at the discretion of the referee.

PROTESTS

- There are NO PROTESTS in the Youth Football program. The only things that can be questioned are a player's age. NO PROTESTS will be allowed on rules, judgment calls, clock operations or any other item. Games cannot be played under protest.

GAME OFFICIALS

- The League Coordinators will schedule game officials. There should be two officials scheduled for each game.
- Once the referee announces the call to the coaches- IT IS FINAL! If a coach needs clarification of the call, it will be allowed, but will cost the coach a timeout. Any coach/player/parent/fan who verbally harasses or physically touches an official can be penalized and or ejected from the field.

- We ask that all Coaches and Coordinators exert every effort to control your fans and to always cooperate with game officials. The game officials do have the authority to prematurely end a game if it is warranted due to uncontrollable crowds.

LIVE BALL / DEAD BALL

- The ball is live at the snap of the ball and remains live until the official whistles the ball dead.
- 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. Regarding 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.
- A player who gains possession in the air is considered in bounds if one foot comes down in the field of play.
- 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 penalty.
- Substitutions may be made on any dead ball.
- Any official can whistle the play dead.
- Play is ruled “dead” when:
 - The ball hits the ground.
 - The ball carrier’s flag is pulled.
 - The ball carrier steps out of bounds.
 - A touchdown, PAT or safety is scored.
 - The ball carrier’s knee or arm hits the ground.
 - The ball carrier’s flag falls out.
 - The ball carrier receives the ball while in possession of no flags.
 - The receiver catches the ball while in possession of no flags.
- There is no recovery of a fumble. The ball is spotted where the ball carrier’s feet were at the time of the fumble.
- In the case of an inadvertent whistle, the offense has two options:
 - Take the ball where it was when the whistle blew, and the down is consumed.
 - Replay the down from the original line of scrimmage.

- A team can use a time out to question an official’s rule interpretation. If the official’s ruling is correct, the team will be charged a time out. If the rule is interpreted incorrectly, the time out will not be charged, and the proper ruling will be enforced. Officials should all agree upon any controversial call in order to give each team the full benefit of each call.

PASSING

- Quarterbacks must throw the ball within 10-seconds of the snap. If the quarterback has not thrown the ball in the allotted time, the play will be blown dead and the ball returned to the line of scrimmage.
- All passes must be thrown from behind the line of scrimmage and received beyond the line scrimmage.
- Shovel passes are allowed but must be received beyond the line of scrimmage.

RECEIVING

- All players are eligible to receive passes (including the quarterback, if the ball has been handed off behind the line of scrimmage).
- 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 towards the line of scrimmage.
- A player must have a least one foot inbounds when making a reception.
- In the case of simultaneous possession by both an offensive and defensive player, possession is awarded to the offense.
- Interceptions are returnable.

RUNNING

- The ball is spotted where the runner’s feet are when the flag is pulled, not where the ball carrier has the ball. Forward progress will be measured by the player’s front foot.
- The quarterback can run the ball.
- Only 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.
- Handoffs may be direct handoffs, tosses, or pitches.
- “Center Sneak” play – The ball must completely leave the center’s hands on the snap and he/she must step backwards off the line of scrimmage in order to receive a direct handoff from the QB before advancing the ball.

- Absolutely **NO** laterals of any kind.
- “No-Run Zones,” located 5 yards before each end zone and 5 yards on either side of midfield are designed to avoid short-yardage power-running situations. Teams are not allowed to run in these zones if the subsequent line is LIVE. (Reminder: Each offensive squad approaches only TWO No-Run Zones in each drive – one 5 yards from midfield to gain the first down, and one 5 yards from the goal line to score a TD).
- The player who takes the handoff 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, all defensive players inside the rush line are eligible to rush.
- Runners may not leave their feet to advance the ball. Diving, leaping, or jumping to avoid a flag pull is considered flag guarding.
- Spinning is allowed, but players may not leave their feet to avoid a flag pull. Jumping in the air in a forward motion to advance the ball, while attempting to avoid a flag pull, is not allowed. Lateral moves to the left or right are permitted.
- 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.
- A basketball screen is the only legal form of blocking. No other form of blocking is allowed.
- Flag Guarding: 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. 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 and is not allowed.
- Ball carriers **MUST** make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position.

RUSHING THE PASSER

- All players who rush the passer 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 may defend on the line of scrimmage.
- For the 9-12 age groups, the rush line is ten yards from the line of scrimmage.
- Once the ball is handed off, the rush line rule is no longer in effect and all defenders may go behind the line of scrimmage.
- A special marker, or the referee, will designate a Rush Line seven yards or ten yards from the line of scrimmage. Defensive players should verify they are in the correct position with the official on every play.
- Any defensive player, for any reason, crossing the line of scrimmage will allow the quarterback to run the ball even if the offense is in the pass only zone.

- A legal rush is:
 - Any rush from a point 7 or 10 yards from the defensive line of scrimmage.
 - A rush from anywhere on the field AFTER the ball has been handed off by the quarterback.
 - If a rusher leaves the rush line early (breaks the 7- or 10-yard area), they may return to the rush line, reset and then legally rush the quarterback.
 - If a rusher leaves the rush line early and the ball is handed off before they cross the line of scrimmage, they may legally rush the quarterback.
- A penalty may be called if:
 - The rusher leaves the rush line before the snap crosses the line of scrimmage before a handoff or pass – Illegal Rush (5 yards LOS and first down).
 - Any defensive player crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped – Offside (5 yards LOS and first down).
 - Any defensive player not lined up at the rush line crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is passed or handed off.
- Players rushing the quarterback may attempt to block a pass; however, NO contact can be made with the quarterback in any way. Blocking the pass or attempting to block the pass and then making contact with the passer will result in a roughing the passer penalty.
- A sack occurs if the quarterback's flags are pulled behind the line of scrimmage. The ball is placed where the quarterback's feet are when the flag is pulled.
- A Safety is awarded if the sack takes place in the offensive team's end zone.

DEFENSE

- A legal flag pull takes place when the ball carrier is in full possession of the ball.
- Defenders can dive to pull flags, but cannot tackle, hold or run through the ball carrier when pulling flags.
- Defensive players may not intentionally grab and hold the ball carriers uniform to make a flag pull.
- It is illegal to attempt to strip or pull the ball from the ball carrier's possession at any time.
- 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.
- A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off a player who is not in possession of the ball.
- Defenders are not allowed to run through the ball carrier when pulling flags.

FORMATIONS

- Offense must have a minimum of two players on the line of scrimmage. The quarterback must be off the line of scrimmage.
- One player at a time may go in motion behind and parallel to the line of scrimmage.
- No motion is allowed towards the line of scrimmage.
- 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.
- The center must snap the ball between his/her legs to a player in the backfield, and the ball must completely leave his/her hands.

UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT

- Using acts or words by the defensive team that are designed to mask/simulate the offensive snap count is considered unsportsmanlike conduct.
- 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!
- Offensive or confrontational language is illegal. 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.
- Players may not physically or verbally abuse any opponent, coach or official.
- Ball carriers MUST make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position.
- Defenders are not allowed to run through the ball carrier when pulling flags.
- Parents/fans must also adhere to good sportsmanship, as well the conduct listed above.
- Parents/fans should also adhere to the following:
 - Yell to cheer on your players, not to harass officials or other teams.
 - Keep comments clean and profanity free.
 - Compliment ALL players, not just one child or team.

- Parents/fans are not allowed on the field at any time during the game.

PENALTY INFORMATION

- The referee will call all penalties.
- Referees determine incidental contact that may result from normal run of play.
- All penalties will be assessed from the line of scrimmage, except as noted. (spot fouls)
- Only the team captain or head coach may ask the referee questions about rule clarification and interpretations. Players may not question judgment calls.
- Games may not end on a defensive penalty, unless the offense declines it.
- Penalties are assessed live ball then dead ball. Live ball penalties must be assessed before play is considered complete.
- Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal yardage when the penalty yardage is more than half the distance to the goal.
- All penalties that are spot fouls and result in a loss of down mean the following:
 - The loss of down is technically the down that was just played. As an example: if the penalty occurs on first down, the offense receives the yards gained minus the penalty yards. The next down would be second down.
- Teams cannot be penalized into or out of the pass only zone.
 - If the offensive team is penalized and the possession is moved out of the pass only zone, they are still considered in the pass only zone; they must pass until they move themselves out of the pass only zone.
 - If the defensive team is penalized and the offensive team's possession is moved into the pass only zone, the offensive team is not considered in the pass only zone; they may run or pass.

DEFENSIVE PENALTIES

Offside	+ 5 yards from line of scrimmage & Automatic First Down
Illegal Rush (Starting rush from inside blitz line marker)	+ 5 yards from line of scrimmage & Automatic First Down
Illegal Flag Pull (Before the receiver has the ball)	+ 5 yards from line of scrimmage & Automatic First Down
Roughing the Passer	+ 10 yards from line of scrimmage & Automatic First Down
Taunting	+ 10 yards from line of scrimmage & Automatic First Down
Defensive Pass Interference	SPOT FOUL, Automatic First Down
Holding (holding jersey to make flag pull or holding offensive player without ball)	SPOT FOUL + 5 yards & Automatic First Down
Stripping	SPOT FOUL + 10 yards & Automatic First Down
Defensive Unnecessary Roughness	SPOT FOUL + 10 yards & Automatic First Down
Tackling	SPOT FOUL + 10 yards & Automatic First Down
Coaching During Play	SPOT FOUL + 5 yards & Automatic First Down
Game Misconduct	+ 10 yards from line of scrimmage & Automatic First Down

OFFENSIVE PENALTIES

False Start	- 5 yards from line of scrimmage & Loss of Down
Illegal Forward Pass (Pass received behind the line of scrimmage or throwing a pass beyond the line of scrimmage)	- 5 yards from line of scrimmage & Loss of Down
Offensive Pass Interference	- 5 yards from line of scrimmage & Loss of Down
Illegal Motion (More than one person moving)	- 5 yards from line of scrimmage & Loss of Down
Illegal Run	- 5 yards from line of scrimmage & Loss of Down
Delay of Game	- 5 yards from line of scrimmage & Loss of Down
Impeding the Rusher	- 5 yards from line of scrimmage & Loss of Down
Blocking or Running with the Ball Carrier	SPOT FOUL, - 5 yards & Loss of Down
Charging	SPOT FOUL, - 10 yards & Loss of Down
Flag Guarding	SPOT FOUL, - 10 yards & Loss of Down
Offensive Unnecessary Roughness	SPOT FOUL, - 10 yards & Loss of Down
Coaching During Play	- 5 yards from line of scrimmage & Loss of Down
Game Misconduct	- 10 yards from line of scrimmage & Loss of Down