

NFL Flag Basics

1. 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.
2. The winner of the coin toss gets the choice to either start the game on defense or receive the ball and take the first offensive possession. Teams may not choose to defer to second half choice.
3. The offensive team takes possession of the ball at its 5-yard line and has three (3) plays to cross midfield. Once a team crosses midfield; it has three (3) plays to score a touchdown.
4. If the offense fails to score, the ball changes possession and the new offensive team takes over on its 5-yard line.
5. If the offensive team fails to cross midfield, possession of the ball changes and the opposition starts its drive from its 5-yard line.
6. All possession changes, except interceptions, start on the offense's 5-yard line.
7. Teams change sides after the first half. Possession changes to whoever started on defense to begin the game
8. The clock does not stop except under special circumstances under 2 minutes and when a team uses one of their three timeouts a half..

Equipment

1. The league provides each player with flag belts, mouth pieces and each team with two footballs. Teams must use league provided footballs during all games. Teams cannot provide their own personal ball for use.
2. Players must wear shoes. Cleats are allowed, however cleats with exposed metal are not allowed and must be removed.
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 watches, earrings, rubber wristbands and any other jewelry that the officials deem hazardous.
5. Official NFL FLAG jerseys must be worn during play.
6. Player's jerseys must be tucked into the pants.
7. Pants or shorts with belt loops or pockets will not be allowed, any shorts or pants with pockets must have the pockets sewn shut.
8. Shorts worn must be in contrast with flag colors (Blue/Red).

Eligibility

1. A player's age must fall within the specified age-range as of June 1st of the current year. Age will be verified by a valid birth certificate.

Players/Game Schedules

1. Teams must field a minimum of four players at all times.
2. Teams consist of 8-10 players – five on the field, with three to five substitutes.
3. Home teams wear white side of jerseys and visiting teams wear dark side of jerseys.

Timing/Overtime

1. Games are played on a 40 minute continuous clock. The clock WILL stop only on any TD or change of Possession **under 2 minutes if the score is two Touchdowns or closer (12points) or**

when the team uses one of their three timeouts in each half. All timeouts are 30 seconds.

2. Halftime is five (5) minutes long.
 3. Each time the ball is spotted, a team has 30 seconds to snap the ball. Teams will receive one warning before a delay-of-game penalty is enforced.
 4. Each team has three 30-second time outs per half.
 5. Officials can stop the clock at their discretion.
 6. 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 clock is stopped due to an injured player, that player must sit out at least one play.
 7. If the score is tied at the end of 40 minutes, teams move directly into overtime. Captains and Officials will meet at the 25 yard line for the coin toss.
 8. Overtime will be used to determine a winner. OT format is as follows:
 - A. Each team will get one series of three downs starting from the opponent's team 12 yard line.
 - B. First possession choice goes to the winner of the coin toss
 - C. Each team gets a minimum of one possession
 - D. All regulation period rules and penalties are in effect.
 - E. There will be one time allowed during 1st OT period.
 - F. Scoring teams can go for 1 or 2 point PAT
 - G. If either team or both teams score we will move into the 2nd OT period.
 - H. Each team again will receive three downs starting from the opponent's team 5 yard line.
 - I. There will be no time outs allowed in the 2nd overtime.
- Game cannot end in a tie. Will continue Overtime Periods, as needed.

Scoring

1. Touchdown: 6 points
2. PAT (Point after Touchdown) 1 point (5-yard line) or 2 points (12-yard line) .Note: 1 point PAT is pass only, 2 point PAT can be run or pass. If a defender intercepts a pass and runs it back, this counts as a safety and that team is awarded two points.
3. Safety: 2 points
 - a. 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. There is no Safety if an offensive penalty occurs in the end zone. The ball is placed on the goal line.
4. A team that scores a touchdown must declare whether they wish to attempt a 1-pt. conversion (from the 5-yard line) or a 2-pt. conversion (from the 12-yard line). The PAT decision cannot be changed after a penalty.

Coaches

1. Coaches are volunteer parents or family members helping the players learn and enjoy the game.

Parents are encouraged to support the coach at all time.
2. Coaches are expected to adhere to all NFL FLAG and St. Mary's County Youth NFL Flag Football League coaching guidelines and codes of conduct throughout the entire season including post season playoffs.
4. Only two coaches per team are allowed.

5. All coaches must be trained through the NYSCA and also have had a background check performed through St. Mary's Parks & Rec. prior to working with the kids.

Live Ball/Dead Ball

1. The ball is live at the snap of the ball and remains live until the 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 regards to the neutral zone, the official may give both teams a "courtesy" neutral zone notification to allow their players to move back beyond the line.
3. A player who gains possession in the air is considered in bounds as long as **one** foot comes down in the field of play.
4. The ball must be snapped between the legs, not off to one side, to start play.
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.
6. Substitutions may be made on any dead ball.
7. Any official can whistle the play dead.
8. Play is ruled "dead" when:
 - a. The ball hits 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. (Official will make judgment call on this, if a defender is no where near the player when the flag falls off, then the play will continue)
 - g. The receiver catches the ball while in possession of one flag.
 - h. The 7 second pass clock expires.
 - i. An inadvertent whistle is performed (at the spot where the ball was whistled dead).
9. In the case of an inadvertent whistle, the offense has two options:
 - a. Take the ball where the whistle blown made the play dead.
 - or
 - b. Replay the down from the original line of scrimmage.

Note: There are no fumbles. The ball is spotted where the ball hits the ground. If the ball is fumbled in the end zone the ball will be spotted on the goal line. This is not a safety.

Running

1. The ball is spotted where the runner's feet are when the flag is pulled, not where the ball carrier has the ball.
If one foot precedes the other, the forward foot marks the spot.
 - a. For 1st Downs and Goal Lines, the ball, feet AND entire Flag Belt must cross the line.
2. The quarterback cannot directly run with the ball.
3. Only direct handoffs behind the line of scrimmage are permitted. Offense may use multiple handoffs.
4. Absolutely NO laterals or pitches of any kind.
5. "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, one 5 yards from the goal line to score a TD 5 yards). - (**Tiny Mites Division Exempt**).

6. The player who takes the handoff can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage.
7. Once the ball has been handed off in front or behind the quarterback, all defensive players are eligible to rush.
8. Diving, leaping or jumping forward is considered flag guarding.
9. Spinning is allowed. (Must remain on your feet.)
10. No blocking or “screening” is allowed at any time.
11. Offensive players must stop their motion once the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage. No running with the ball carrier.
12. 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.

Receiving

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

Passing

1. All passes must be from behind the line of scrimmage, thrown forward and received beyond the line of scrimmage. (**Tiny Mites Division Exempt**).
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, 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 no longer is in effect.
 - a. 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
4. Interceptions are returnable.

Rushing the Quarterback

1. 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 as long as there is a one yard buffer from the line of scrimmage.
2. Once the ball is handed off, the seven-yard rule no longer is in effect and all defenders may go behind 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. All Defensive rushes that start behind the designated 7yd marker and are within 2 football lengths from the marker itself.

ii. A rush from anywhere on the field AFTER the ball has been handed off by the quarterback.

iii. If a rusher leaves the rush line early, they may return to the rush line, reset and then legally rush the quarterback.

iv. 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.

b. A penalty may be called if:

i. The rusher leaves the rush line before the snap and crosses the line of scrimmage before a handoff or pass – Illegal Rush (5 yards and first down).

ii. Any defensive player crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped – Offsides (5 yards and first down).

iii. Any defensive player, not lined up at the designated 7yd rush marker crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is passed or handed – Illegal Rush (5 yards and first down).

c. Special circumstances:

i. Teams are not required to rush the quarterback, seven second clock in effect.

ii. Teams are not required to identify their rusher before the play, however if they do send a rusher, the rusher must begin their rush from the 7yd rushing marker.

iii. If a rusher leaves the 7-yard line before the snap, he/she may immediately drop back to act as a defender with no offside penalty enforced.

4. Players rushing the Quarterback may attempt to block a pass. However, NO contact can be made with the quarterback or passer in any way. The defense may attempt to block a pass provided they do not strike the passer.

6. Blocking the pass and then striking the passer will result in a 10-yard penalty and automatic 1st down.

7. A Sack occurs if the QB's flags are pulled behind the line of scrimmage. The ball is placed where the QB's feet are when 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 ball carrier when pulling flags.

3. It is illegal to attempt to strip or pull the ball or pull from the ball carrier's possession or Quarterbacks Hand 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. (This will be a judgment call by the Official, if no one is around the player and there is no chance of a defender catching them, the play will continue)

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 of head, hand, arm or shoulder, or intentionally covering flags with the football or jersey.

Formations

1. An offensive team must have a minimum of one player on the line of scrimmage (the Center) 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 beyond and parallel to the line of scrimmage.
 - b. No motion is allowed towards the line of scrimmage.
2. Offensive players must come to a complete stop for one second before the ball is snapped unless he/she is the one player in motion.
3. 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.
4. 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. The person calling out the signals is the quarterback; the center may not snap the ball to any other player other than the quarterback.

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! FOUL PLAY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.
2. 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.
3. Players may not physically or verbally abuse any opponent 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:
 - 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 coolers, chairs and tents away from the sidelines.
 - b. Please clean up your sideline after your child's game.

Penalties

1. The referee will call all penalties.
2. Referees determine incidental contact.
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 cannot question judgment calls.
5. Two forms of penalties are assessed: live ball and dead ball. Live ball penalties must be assessed before the play is considered completed.

6. Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal line if the distance to the goal line is less than the penalty yardage.

ii. **5 Yard Penalties**

Illegal Equipment

Offside

Illegal motion (more than one person moving, false start, etc.)

Illegal forward pass (pass received behind line of scrimmage or throwing a pass beyond the line of scrimmage)

Offensive pass interference (illegal pick play, pushing off/away defender)

Screening, Blocking or Running with the ball carrier

Delay of game

Defense Illegal flag pull (before receiver has ball)

Defense Illegal rushing (starting rush from inside 7-yard marker)

iii. **10 Yard Penalties**

Roughing the passer

Defense Illegal contact

Flag Guarding / Stiffing arm

Stripping (Spot Foul)

iiii. **15 Yard Penalties**

Any Unsportsmanlike conduct:

Offensive Charging

Taunting

Players may NOT throw pulled flags to the ground. They must hand them either to the player it belongs to or leave them lie on the ground.

If penalty occurs while scoring a touchdown, the offense will receive a 10 yard penalty from the yard line of PAT attempt after touchdown (one warning to the player and team before ejection).

We allow coaches to be on the field for different age groups. The Official will make the announcement "Coaches Out" at that time you are not to help the players, unless you are standing on the sidelines. We will give one warning to each coach. After the warning if the penalty occurs by the offense, play will be called dead and the team will lose a down, if the penalty occurs on the defensive team, a 10 yard penalty will be assessed to the end of the play and an automatic first down. **Tiny Mite Division is exempt.**

Spot Fouls

Flag guarding - 10 yards & loss of down

Defensive Pass Interference - Automatic first down from spot of penalty

Stripping - 10 yards and first down

Unnecessary Roughness -15 yards & loss of down

Defensive Illegal contact - 10 yards and automatic 1st down

Offensive Charging - 15 yards & loss of down

Defense

- Offside -5 yards from the LOS & automatic first down
- Interference - Spot foul and automatic first down
- Illegal flag pull (Before receiver has ball) - 5 yards LOS and automatic first down
- Illegal rushing (Starting rush from inside 7-yard marker) - 5 yards LOS and automatic first down
- Roughing the passer -10 yards LOS and first down
- Illegal contact (holding, blocking) - Spot foul,10 yards and automatic first down
- Unnecessary Roughness - Spot foul, 15 yards and first down
- Stripping - Spot foul, 10 yards and first down

Offense

- Illegal motion (More than one person moving, false start, etc.) *Play Dead Immediately* - 5 yards LOS and loss of down
- Illegal forward pass (Pass received behind line of scrimmage or throwing a pass beyond the line of scrimmage) - 5 yards LOS and loss of down
- Offensive pass interference (Illegal pick play, pushing off/away defender) - 5 yards LOS and loss of down
- Flag guarding / Stiff arming - Spot foul, 10 yards & loss of down
- Screening, Blocking or Running with the ball carrier - 5 yards LOS and loss of down
- Charging - Spot foul, 15 yards & loss of down In Addition: That player be given a warning and will sit out the rest of that series. Repeat infraction will result in ejection from game.
- Delay of game - 5 yards LOS and loss of down

Referees determine incidental contact that may result from normal run of play.

Only the team captain may ask the referee questions about rule clarification and interpretations. Players cannot question judgment calls.

Halftime and the Final play of the game cannot end on a defensive penalty, unless the offense declines it.

SMCFFL ADDITIONAL RULES:

Defensive plays in which a player is clearly **NOT** going for the flag to make a play will result in the Offensive team gaining possession of the ball at the opponents 7 yd line, 1st and Goal. That player will also be ejected for the remainder of the series. If the same Defensive player repeats the infraction sometime during the course of the game, he will be ejected from the remainder of the game. The defensive rusher/s may attempt to block the pass but it is a penalty to make contact with the quarterback's body or arm.

No direct QB back to Center handoffs.

Coaches are responsible for their Parents actions on the sidelines. If a referee at any time feels a parent's conduct is detrimental to the game, a warning will be given to the coach. If it still

persists, a 10 yd penalty and automatic 1st down will result if on defense.

If on offense, 10 yds and loss of down. A third infraction will result in that parent being asked to leave the field or the game will be forfeited. This includes but is not limited too: Yelling at the referees, opposing players, coaches or sidelines. Coaches that are ejected from the game will go before the Board and may face suspension from further games.

Attire

Cleats are allowed, except for metal spikes. Inspections must be made. All players must wear a protective mouthpiece; there are no exceptions. (Clear & White mouthpieces are not allowed)

Official NFL FLAG jerseys must be worn during play. (Some kids may not be able to fit in the NFL jersey's that have been supplied to them. The Board will inform the other coaches of these players.

Note: There are no kickoffs, and no blocking is allowed.

What is the league policy on "playing time"? : The SMCFFL "NFL" Youth Flag Football League is a "recreation" league open to all children ages 5 to 17 years old – regardless of skill level. Therefore it is league policy that ALL kids play at least **seven (7) plays per half per game**. The only exception to this rule would be by the parents request that their child either play less or not at all for possible academic reasons or other personal reasons. In addition, all players will be given the opportunity to play at both RB and QB positions at least **four (4) plays throughout the course of the season** unless the child does not want to play those certain positions. In which case, the coach will work with that individual to build up his/her confidence and abilities to at least give it a try before seasons end. All players should have an opportunity to play both offense and defense each game – and at different positions during the course of the season (not necessarily different positions each and every game). This policy includes the Playoffs and Super Bowls. If excessive practices are missed however, the coach may only be able to put that particular player in on offense or defense only, if he deems the player not familiar with certain plays that have been worked on during practices.

ZERO TOLERANCE RULE : Verbal abuse towards league officials, coaches, parents, opposing players, etc in front of the kids by a coach, player or parent that disagrees with a "call" that a referee made - or an any other action on or off the field will not be tolerated. Referees and coaches in all youth league sports (not just our league) are very hard to find – and then train. Our league like many others, have a very hard time finding referees to officiate our games. There will be ZERO TOLERANCE with permanent ejection at the fields for any adult (or child for that matter) that constantly abuses another individual.

GAME SUMMARIES: Referees are responsible for reporting the final scores to the league and will confirm the score with the coaches after each score. Coaches do not need to report final game scores to the league. Coaches will need to sign score cards. Once the score card has been signed, nothing can be changed.

ROSTERS : Rosters once published from the league are final. Each roster will have the same amount of equal age kids as all others. This will help create a competitive balance greater than youth sports leagues that hold “so called” draft of players (which often get manipulated).

Despite many parents asking to have their child placed on friends or specific coaches team (for many different reasons) – the league has stated to all parents that such requests are logistically impossible to accommodate all of these requests when the league is so large. We will attempt to accommodate requests to the best of our abilities prior to the season starting but there are NO Guarantees on any requests made.

PRACTICES : Practices are held in various areas of St. Mary’s County, Coaches will be assigned practice days and locations by the league. Coaches can schedule practices on any of the available dates and times that the league makes available. The league advertises to parents that most coaches hold two practice per week during the season, and maybe a few more per week before the start of the regular season not to exceed two (3) days a week maximum and no longer than two (2) Hours maximum at anytime during the season.

SCHEDULES : Once published in late March.– schedules are FINAL and cannot be changed. Often coaches will request a simple change in a game time slot in the middle of the season after the schedules have been out. While on paper it seems like nothing major, please keep in mind that if the league accommodates one coach request, it must accommodate ALL coaches’ requests. A simple one game change in schedule involves several teams having their game time moved – and this effects the parents of all of these teams that may have scheduled their Saturdays around an already published league schedule of ours.

JERSEYS : All participants will get to keep their official NFL Flag jersey and Flags at the conclusion of the season. Home teams will be the 1st team listed on the schedules and will wear their white side of jerseys.

When you have completed registration and have selected the desired jersey size for the participant, there will be no exchanges on sizes once received. So please make sure to order the correct size when registering your child. NFL Flag jerseys will only be made available to NFL Flag participants and are not for individual purchase.

RAIN & INCLEMENT WEATHER HOTLINE : If games need to be cancelled due to inclement weather the league web site will post details on cancellations early on Saturday mornings on the front of the web page. The league telephone number will have a message stating whether games are “on” or “off” for that Saturday. St. Mary’s county Parks & Rec. are the deciding factor if games and practices will be held. Parents are responsible to dress their children appropriately when weather is less than optimal. Hats, jackets, and double layers of clothing are recommended if such weather is

present. Also, a change of clothes might be wise as well if you are planning to stay for other games during the day.

LEAGUE STANDINGS & PLAYOFFS: Each team qualifies for the playoffs. Playoffs will be single elimination format with multiple playoff rounds (games) being played the same day. There will be one or two days of playoffs with the Super Bowls being played at the conclusion of the day. Playoff seeding will be determined by the team's standings of the season. Regular season standings will determine the Playoff seeding structure.

League regular season standings will be determined primarily by WON-LOST record. Teams tied in the standings will be broken by Head to Head record and then by **Points Allowed**. Deliberately running up the scores in the SMCFFL is viewed as unsportsmanlike conduct and will not be tolerated.

COACHES ON THE FIELD: Below is league policy for the 2009 Spring Season

****Tiny Mites Division (5 to 6 year olds):** One coach is allowed in the huddle on offense as well as one coach out on the field with the defense. Please note that once the play starts, both coaches must immediately back away as to not interfere with the game action.

**** Little Pro Division (7 to 9 year olds):** One coach is allowed in the huddle on offense as well as one coach out on the field with the defense. Please note that once the play starts, both coaches must immediately back away as to not interfere with the game action.

**** Pro Division (10 to 12 year olds):** One Coach is allowed in the huddle on offense. No coach is allowed on the field for defense.

**** Top Pro Division (13 & older):** No coach is allowed on the field. Must coach from the sidelines.

The Field

1. The field size is 30 yards by 70 yards with two 10-yard end zones and a midfield line-to-gain. No-Running Zones precede each line-to-gain by 5 yards.
2. No Run Zones are in place to prevent teams from conducting power run plays. While in the No Run Zones, teams may not run the ball in any fashion. All plays, including those that begin with a handoff, must be pass plays.
3. Stepping on the boundary line is considered out of bounds.
4. Each offensive squad approaches only TWO No Run Zones in each drive (one zone 5 yards from midfield to gain the first down, one zone 5 yards from the goal line to score a TD).