



***Special
Olympics***
New Jersey

FLAG FOOTBALL

RULES

Special Olympics New Jersey

Flag Football Rules

- The Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Flag Football shall govern all Special Olympics competitions.
- Special Olympics has created these rules based upon National Football League's Air It Out Flag Football rules, which shall be employed except when they are in conflict with the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Flag Football.

RULES OF COMPETITION

EQUIPMENT

1. An intermediate (youth) size football will be used in all divisions.
2. A protective mouthpiece must be worn at all times. Athletes without their own mouthpiece will not be permitted to play
3. A one piece three flag belt will be used during the game.

UNIFORM SPECIFICATIONS

1. All participants must have a playing uniform consisting of matching shirts with numbers on front and back which must be tucked in at the waist.
2. Athletic shorts or sweatpants are appropriate. They should be the same color throughout the team and CAN NOT have pockets. An athlete wearing blue jeans or other pants/shorts with pockets will not be allowed to participate.
3. No jewelry may be worn (rings, bracelets, necklaces, earrings, etc.)
4. Players must wear rubber-cleated or flat-soled athletic shoes.
 - a. Metal cleats, spikes, hiking boots or other equipment deemed dangerous by officials will not be allowed.

GENERAL RULES

1. Special Olympics Flag Football is non-contact.
 - a. In all aspects of Special Olympics Flag Football, rulings shall be made with player safety as the primary consideration.
2. The team roster may contain a maximum of 12 players.
3. Teams shall field five (5) players to start the game (required).
 - a. Teams may continue with a minimum of four (4) players if necessary, due to disqualification or injury.
 - b. Athletes may miss up to two league games and remain eligible for Chapter competition. Coaches will be alerted of their athlete's eligibility status prior to the end of the season.
 - i. Should a forfeit occur at the competition site, only those athletes who are present and on the roster of the non-forfeiting team will receive credit for participation. Should a team cancel or report a forfeit prior to the day of competition, the athletes participating on that offending team will not receive credit for participation.
 - ii. Should any athlete arrive 15 minutes after the start of the game, he/she will not be permitted to play.
 - iii. Should any season contain less than 3 league games completed due to weather or any other circumstance beyond the control of Special Olympics New Jersey, eligibility

criteria for chapter competition will be reviewed under the discretion of Special Olympics New Jersey.

4. Teams will be grouped in divisions for the Fall Sports Festival based on a classification round of games (League Play).
5. Points of Emphasis
 - a. No team shall repeatedly commit fouls which halve the distance to the goal line.
 - b. Neither team shall commit any act which, in the opinion of the referee, tends to make a travesty of the game. This includes intentionally committing fouls to gain an advantage.
 - c. The referee will enforce any penalty he/she considers equitable, including the award of a score for an unfair act.
6. Scoring
 - a. Touchdown: six (6) points.
 - b. Extra Point: one (1) point from the 5-yard line, two (2) points from the 10-yard line.
 - c. Safety: two (2) points.
7. Timing
 - a. The game shall consist of two (2) 20-minute halves (running time).
 - b. Officials can stop the clock at their discretion (injuries, delays).
 - c. Each team receives one (1) 60-second time-out per half.
 - i. An unused time-out in the first half does not carry over to the second half.
 - d. There shall be a 5-minute break at halftime.
8. Coin Toss
 - a. A coin toss determines first possession.
 - b. Each team will provide two (2) captains.
 - c. The officials and team captains will meet three (3) minutes prior to the start of the contest to conduct the coin toss.
 - d. The winner of the coin toss will choose offense, defense, or end of field to defend. The team winning the coin toss may defer its choice to the second half.
9. Possessions
 - a. All possessions, except following an interception, start at the offensive team's 5-yard line.
 - b. The offense has four (4) plays to cross mid-field.
 - c. Once the offense crosses mid-field, they have four (4) additional plays to score a touchdown.
 - d. If the offensive team fails to cross mid-field or score a touchdown in the given number of plays, possession of the ball changes and the opposite team starts at their 5-yard line.
 - e. Interceptions change possession of the ball at the spot of the interception.
 - i. A ball intercepted in the end zone is spotted at the 5-yard line.
 - f. Each time the ball is spotted (marked ready for play by the official) the team has 30-seconds to snap the ball.
10. Positions/Snap
 - a. The ball must be snapped between the legs to start each play.
 - b. No minimum number of players are required to line-up on the line of scrimmage.
11. Rushing the Quarterback (QB)
 - a. All players who rush the Quarterback must be a minimum of 5-yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.
 - i. A special marker, placed by the official, will designate the spot 5-yards from the line of scrimmage.
 - b. Players not rushing the quarterback may defend at the line of scrimmage.

- c. Once the Quarterback hands the ball to another player, the 5-yard zone no longer exists, and all defenders are eligible to rush.

12. Running the Ball

- a. The Quarterback (player receiving the snap) CAN NOT run the ball.
- b. Only direct hand-offs behind the line of scrimmage, and behind the Quarterback are legal. Forward handoffs, laterals or pitches of any kind are not allowed.
- c. The player who takes a hand-off can pass the ball, as long as he/she does not cross the line of scrimmage.
- d. "No Running Zones" are located 5-yards before the mid-field line and goal line.
 - i. Any ball snapped from these zones must be passed.
 - ii. The purpose of "No Running Zones" is to avoid short yardage power running situations.
- e. The ball carrier may not spin, dive, hurdle, or use either arm to shield a defender from grasping his/her flag.
- f. The ball is spotted where the ball carrier's belt is when the flag is pulled.

13. Passing and Receiving the Ball

- a. All passes must be forward and received beyond the line of scrimmage.
- b. All players are eligible to receive a forward pass, including the Quarterback, if he/she has legally handed-off.
 - i. Exception: In Unified Sports® divisions, if a partner throws a pass, only athletes are eligible receivers.
- c. Only one (1) player is allowed in motion at the snap and he/she may not be moving toward the line of scrimmage at the snap.
- d. A player must have at least one (1) foot in bounds when making a catch.
- e. Interceptions change possession of the ball at the point of the interception.
 - i. Exception: A ball intercepted in the end zone is spotted at the 5-yard line.

14. Dead Balls/Fumbles

- a. There are no fumbles. The ball is spotted where it hits the ground.
- b. Play is ruled dead when:
 - i. The ball carrier's flag is pulled
 - ii. The ball carrier loses his/her flag
 - iii. The ball carrier steps out of bounds
 - iv. The ball carrier's knee or hand touches the ground
 - v. A touchdown, extra point, or safety is scored
 - vi. When during a try-for-point the defense obtains possession of the ball
 - vii. When a forward pass strikes the ground or is caught simultaneously by opposing players (the offense retains possession)
 - viii. A pass is intercepted (no returns)
 - ix. A receiver catches a ball without his/her flags attached
 - x. A snapped ball touches the ground
 - xi. When there is an inadvertent whistle.

15. Penalties

- a. Coaches will have the opportunity to decline or accept any penalty based on the result of the play.
- b. All penalties, if accepted, are assessed from the line of scrimmage.
- c. No penalty may take the ball more than half the distance to the offender's goal line.
- d. Sportsmanship/Roughing
 - i. The officials will disqualify any player who participates in rough or unsportsmanlike play.
 - ii. No warning is required.
- e. Offensive penalties: 10-yards from the line of scrimmage and loss of down

- i. Illegal Motion (more than one (1) player moving at snap, moving forward at snap)
 - ii. Offside (in neutral zone at snap, false start)
 - iii. Illegal forward pass (not beyond line of scrimmage; Partner to Partner)
 - iv. Pass Interference (picking or pushing defender)
 - v. Illegal Contact (holding, blocking, bumping)
 - vi. Flag Guarding (driving, spinning, warding off)
 - vii. Delay of Game (failing to snap within 30 second of ready).
- f. Defense penalties: 10-yards from the line of scrimmage and automatic first down for the offense.
- i. Offside (in or beyond neutral zone at snap)
 - ii. Pass Interference
 - iii. Illegal Contact (holding, blocking, bumping)
 - iv. Illegal Flag Pull (before receiver has ball)
 - v. Illegal Rushing (rushing Quarterback inside 5-yard line).

16. Overtime

- a. If the score is tied at the end of regulation play:
 - i. A coin toss is held to determine first possession
 - a. The winner of the coin toss may choose to play offense or defense first.
 - b. The loser of the coin toss decides which End Zone to attack/defend.
 - ii. Each team receives one (1) possession from the midfield line.
 - iii. If a touchdown is scored, teams can attempt either a 1 point (5 yard line) or 2 point (10 yard line) conversion.
 - iv. If, after both teams have had a possession, the score is still tied, the process is repeated.
 - v. If the score is still tied after completion of the 2nd overtime round, teams MUST attempt a 2 point (10 yard line) conversion if they score a touchdown.
 - vi. The procedure is repeated until one team wins.

SUPPLEMENT TO THE RULES

1. Delay of Game

- a. The ball must be put in play promptly and legally and any action or lack of action by either team that tends to prevent this is considered a delay of game.
- b. This includes:
 - i. Interrupting the 30-second count for any reason except for a granted time-out.
 - ii. Consuming more than 30-seconds to snap the ball after it is ready for play.
 - iii. Failing to remove an injured player for whose benefit an excess time-out has been granted.
 - iv. Deliberately advancing the ball after it has been declared dead.

2. Diving

- a. A defensive or offensive player may dive to catch a pass.
- b. Diving is illegal when used to down a player or advance a ball.
- c. A player cannot dive in an attempt to gain extra yardage.
- d. The team will be penalized accordingly.

3. Eligible Receiver

- a. All offensive players are eligible to receive a pass, except in Unified Sports® divisions where partners are ineligible when partners are throwing the pass.
 - i. Unified Sports® teams are expected to comply with this rule without intervention by officials.
 - j. Failure to “self-patrol” will be considered unsportsmanlike, and will be penalized accordingly.

4. False Start

- a. No member of the offensive team may simulate the start of the play before the ball is snapped.

5. Handling the Ball

- a. Handling the ball is transferring player possession from one teammate to another without throwing or kicking it.
- b. A ball carrier may hand the ball backward at any time while behind the original line of scrimmage.
- c. No forward hand-offs are allowed (Illegal Pass).

6. Hurdling

- a. Jumping over or attempting to jump over a player, by the ball carrier, to prevent from being downed or to gain additional yardage is illegal.
 - i. Note: Jumping over a player who is on the ground to avoid injury, by official’s judgment, is legal.

7. Inadvertent Whistle

- a. In case of an inadvertent whistle the team in possession of the ball may choose to accept the result of the play at the point where the play was blown dead or choose to re-play the down.

8. Line of Scrimmage

- a. The line of scrimmage for each team is a vertical plane through the point of the ball nearest the team’s goal line.
- b. Each player on a team must be on its side of the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.

9. Motion

- a. Only one player of the offensive team may be in motion at the snap.

- i. This player must be behind the Quarterback and not moving toward its goal line at the time the ball is snapped.
- ii. If the player comes to a stop he/she must be set for one (1) second.

10. Screen Blocking

- a. Legally obstructing an opponent without contacting him/her with any part of the screen blocker's body.
- b. The screen blocker shall have his/her arms fully extended to the ground (below the waist) either at his/her side, in front, or behind his/her back.
- c. Any use of arms, elbows, or legs to initiate contact during the screen block is illegal.
- d. A player must be on his/her feet before, during, and after screen blocking.
- e. Screen blocking is the only form of legal blocking that can be used by any player at any time.
- f. If any of the provisions listed are violated, and contact results, the screener has committed an illegal block.
 - i. The screen blocker must give an opponent at least one (1) step.
 - ii. The screen blocker must not initiate contact with opponent.
 - iii. The screen blocker may not take a position so close to a moving opponent that this opponent can not avoid contact by stopping or changing directions.
 - iv. After the snap of the ball, the blocker may move laterally or backward two (2) steps.

11. Shielding (Flag Guarding)

- a. Runners shall not flag guard by using their hands, arms, or the ball to deny the opportunity for an opponent to pull or remove their flag belt. This includes:
 - i. Swinging the hand or arm over the flag belt;
 - ii. Placing the ball in a possession over the flag belt; and
 - iii. Lowering the shoulders or arm over the flag belt.

12. Shift

- a. A shift is the action of one (1) or more offensive players who after taking set positions move to a new position prior to the snap.
- b. A player who shifts must reset for one (1) second prior to the snap.

13. Snap

- a. A snap is the legal act of passing the ball through the legs from the ground to the Quarterback to start a play.

14. Substitutions

- a. Any player on the roster may enter upon the completion of a play (when the ball is dead).
- b. Each substitute must play at least one (1) down prior to being replaced.
- c. A replaced player must leave the field immediately.