



HOMESCHOOL FOOTBALL LEAGUE

Official Flag Football Rulebook (revised 3/8/06)

The football rules of the National Federation of State High School Association will govern play with the following variations:

I. Team Rosters and Responsibilities

- A. Team rosters will be limited to 12 players, with a maximum of 10 and a minimum of 5 players on the field at any time during a competition. If a team drops below the 5-player minimum the game will become a forfeit for the team with less than 5 players.
- B. The number of players on the field for each team will remain equal at all times. This number will correspond with the number of players present on the team with the fewest participants during the game. (i.e. If one team has ten players and the opposing team has eight, the format for the game will be eight-on-eight. If one teams has six players and the opposing team has nine, the format will be six-on-six.)
- C. As Godly sportsmanship is a primary goal of the HFL, all players are required to sign the HFL's code of conduct for players. Each player must have parents or guardians sign the league's code of conduct for parents.
- D. Players are to report at least five minutes prior to the official start time for each game. This time should be used to put on flag belts and make any necessary uniform adjustments.
- F. All participants are to refrain from impure speech and discouraging comments.
- G. All players must remove rings, watches, necklaces, and any other jewelry prior to the start of each game.
- H. All HFL players must have a parent sign a waiver and release of liability form prior to participation in any league-sponsored activity.

II. Equipment and Field

- A. Every member of a team must wear the HFL standard issue flag belts. Belts and flags must be exposed. Failure to do so is subject to a five (5) yard penalty.
- B. Teammates will be required to wear HFL issued uniforms. We purchase these uniforms to create a consistent, team-oriented appearance on the field. Jerseys must be completely tucked in shorts. Shorts are to be worn at the waist. Jerseys and shorts may not be altered. Athletic pants and tops may be worn under HFL uniforms on cold days.
- C. Helmets, shoulder pads, thigh pads, or the use of any hard substance is prohibited.
- D. Football shoes will be allowed. Cleats must be plastic, nylon, or molded rubber. No metal cleats allowed. Any player wearing illegal shoes will be required to discontinue play and change shoes before rejoining his team.
- E. With the exception of football gloves, no "stick-um" or other foreign substances are to be used on hands by any player.
- F. The official length of the field shall be as listed:
Beginner League (ages 6 to 10) – 50 yards x 40 yards, which includes 2, 10-yard end zones with 30 yards of playing field. G,10,10,G

Youth League (ages 9 to 15) – 60 yards x 40 yards, which includes 2, 10-yard end zones with 40 yards of playing field. G,10,20,10,G

Varsity League (ages 13 to 18) – 70 yards x 40 yards, which includes 2, 10-yard end zones with 50 yards of playing field. G,10,20,20,10,G

G. The official game balls are as follow:

Beginner League (ages 6 to 10) – McGregor X2P, PeeWee Size

Youth League (ages 9 to 15) – Nike 1000J, Junior Size

Varsity League (ages 13 to 18) – Nike 1000, Varsity Size

H. The HFL requires all players to wear protective mouth guards and strongly recommends that players with braces see their orthodontist for guards specifically designed to protect this type of dental work. Mouthpieces may be purchased at almost any sporting good store like Dick's or Sports Authority or discount retail store, such as Kmart and Wal-Mart.

III. Inclement Weather Policies

- A. A football update hotline will be established and communicated by the league director during the registration process for each division of the HFL. The update will be posted two (2) hours prior to the start of any HFL practice or game. No announcements will be made before this time. The message will include the game schedule for that day and instructions on how to handle delays and cancellations. It is recommended that families call this number each week, rain or shine. There will be times when announcements, which do not pertain to the weather, will be made using the football hotline. It is not our practice to announce weather delays or cancellations as a result of early morning conditions or forecasted weather, as there have been countless situations where these have proven not to be sound predictors of the actual game time conditions. In addition to the phone announcement, a detailed email will be sent if any type of game delay or cancellation is made. If the weather is remotely questionable, please call the football hotline or check your email.
- B. Officials and league administrators have been instructed to cancel games when it is apparent that play would be damaging to playing fields. Most of our fields are rentals and it is in the league's best interest to preserve these relationships.
- C. Severe weather delays or cancellations will include intense windstorms, electrical storms, profuse rain, and poor field conditions which have resulted from heavy rains. Mild to moderate rain will not delay games.
- D. Any game interrupted by adverse weather conditions will be postponed for a 30-minute time period. If the poor weather conditions subside, the game will resume. If the inclement weather persists the game will be cancelled or rescheduled. If more than one half of a game has been played, the game will be called and the team with the most points will be declared the winner. If less than one half of the game has been played, the contest will be rescheduled.

IV. Pre-game Ceremony

- A. Each HFL game will begin with a prayer honoring our savior, Jesus Christ. Prayer should be lead by the league administrator or head referee. Please pray for the safety and spiritual growth of the boys, godly sportsmanship throughout the football game and life, and the return of our country to its Christian heritage.

- B. A coin toss, or its equivalent, will be performed at the start of each game. The winning team may choose to kickoff, to receive, which goal it will defend, or to defer its choice to the second half.
- C. At the conclusion of the coin toss, referees and coaches should check all uniforms for compliance with uniform standards as outlined in Section II. To prevent injury, the loose or dangling ends of flag belts should be knotted to the portion of the belt wrapped around the player's waist.

V. Game Forfeiture

- A. Each game shall be played between two teams of up to ten (10) players each. A team must start and finish with a minimum of five (5) players. If at any time a team drops below the five (5) player minimum, the game becomes a forfeit.
- B. If the minimum of five (5) players is not present 15 minutes after the scheduled start time of a game, a forfeit will be declared.
- C. The final score for all forfeits will be 5 to 0.
- D. Once a forfeit has been declared, players will be divided up evenly and a refereed scrimmage will be conducted for all players present. As there is less pressure in a scrimmage, this is a great opportunity to develop the confidence of the younger or less experienced players.

VI. The Clock

- A. Lengths of games for each HFL age divisions are as follows:
Beginner League (ages 6 to 10) – Four Possessions per team or 60 minutes*
Youth League (ages 9 to 15) – Two 25 minute halves, 5-minute halftime
Varsity League (ages 13 to 18) – Two 25 minute halves, 5-minute halftime
 *Beginners play for four (4) quarters or 60 minutes, whichever comes first. One “quarter” of play will be equal to the completion of a full series of downs on offense and defense for both teams. A one or two-minute water break will be taken after both teams have completed their series of downs on offense and defense. This rotation will continue for the equivalent of four (4) quarters or until time expires. If time expires while the teams are in the middle of a “quarter”, the rotation in play will be completed. Each team will receive the same number of possessions or opportunities to score.
- B. Stop Clock Period - The game clock will stop only during the final two minutes of the game. During the stop clock period, the clock will stop for scores, time outs, referee discussions, penalties, incomplete passes, out-of-bounds plays, first downs, touchbacks, and point after attempts. The clock will resume at the snap of the ball. The stop clock rule will not be active if either team has or acquires a lead of 18 or more points in the final two minutes of the game.
- C. A two-minute warning will be given to both teams when there are two minutes remaining in the second half. The clock will stop for this announcement and will restart at the snap of the ball. If a play is in progress at the two-minute mark, the clock will be stopped at the conclusion of the play and the two-minute warning will be given at this time.
- D. Each team may have one (1) time out per half. A time out is one (1) minute. Teams can accumulate timeouts and use both in second half.
- E. Excluding the Beginner League, the ball must be put into play within 35 seconds of placement at the line of scrimmage by the referee. The referee will blow his whistle when the 35 seconds is to begin. A five

(5) yard delay of game penalty will be assessed each time a team does not snap the ball before the expiration of the 35-second clock. Referees should give a 10 second warning. There will be no time limit for the Beginner League. If the referee feels a Beginner League coach is using an excessive amount of game time for huddles, he is to encourage the coach to make an effort to reduce his huddle time.

VII. Rules of Play

- A. Since the purpose of the HFL is to glorify the Lord, displays of anger will not be permitted on the playing field or sideline. This ruling applies to coaches, players, and spectators alike. Insults, harsh words, derogatory comments, and excessive complaining will all be treated as unsportsman-like conduct and the team in violation of this rule will receive a fifteen (15) yard penalty. At the discretion of the referee, players, coaches, or spectators displaying frustration may be asked to leave the playing field. Coaches should immediately address players penalized for unsportsmanlike behavior. Coaches will determine if further discipline should occur (i.e. running a lap, extended leave from game, an apology, etc.).
- B. Only coaches may discuss penalties and game calls with officials during the game. Under no circumstances are coaches allowed to speak disrespectfully or argue with any official. If a coach feels the official's ruling is not in accordance with the HFL rulebook, the coach may call a time out to politely and discreetly challenge the ruling. If the ruling on the field is overturned, the coach will not be charged for the time out and the correction will be made before play resumes. If the ruling is upheld after a brief discussion, play will resume and the coach will be charged one time out. If the coach does not have a time out available, his team will be penalized five (5) yards.
- C. Players may not challenge the authority or calls of any member of the officiating crew. If a player questions a referee for anything other than a rule clarification, the player will receive an unsportsman-like penalty of fifteen (15) yards. Players "begging" for calls from an official will also be charged with unsportsmanlike conduct. Referees will make mistakes and that is part of the game. Complaining does not build Godly character.
- D. Proximity of players to sideline - At the start of each play, no players may attempt to deceive the defense. Players must position themselves in such a manner that is easily distinguished as a player.
- E. All players are eligible to receive a pass.
- F. First downs may be gained by advancing the ball ten yards from the original line of scrimmage.
- G. Once the ball has been carried or passed over the line of scrimmage, it may not be brought back across the line and passed. If this occurs, the play will be allowed to continue until the play is dead. If the illegal pass results in an interception, the play will stand. All other cases will result in a five (5) yard penalty with a loss of down. The Penalty will be marked off from the line of scrimmage.
- H. Laterals or backward passes made behind the line of scrimmage are still eligible to be thrown as a forward pass. Forward passes, in front or behind the line of scrimmage, are not eligible to be passes again.
- I. Screening in the backfield for the quarterback and downfield for the ball carrier is legal, but the player setting the screen must give defensive players a chance to avoid the screen. If contact is made, a penalty will be assessed.
- J. Between downs, any number of player substitutes may be made, provided the substitution is completed by having the replaced players off the field before the ball is snapped. Players must report to their team's side of the field. Substitutions may not be used in any manner to deceive your opponents.
- K. The last down in either half will be replayed as a result of a penalty committed by either team (offense or defense), if the opposing team accepts the penalty.

- L. Non-playing team members and spectators may not be on the field while the game is in progress.
- M. The offensive team is responsible for returning the ball to an official or the line of scrimmage promptly. This includes attempt during fourth (4th) down
- N. Ball placement at the exchange of possession will be as follows:

Beginner League (ages 6 to 10) – Each possession will consist of four (4) downs with the ball being put into play 10 yards from the defense’s goal line. The offense will have four (4) downs to score, unless there is a penalty, which necessitates the replay of a down. If the offense does not score, the ball is turned over to the defense.

Youth League (ages 9 to 15) – At the beginning of the game and at the exchange of each possession resulting from the offensive team declaring a “punt”, the ball will be placed at the 10 yard line of the team “receiving the punt”. There is no actual punt. If a team uses a fourth down in an attempt to gain a first down and is unsuccessful, the ball will be turned over to the defense at the spot on the field where the play ended for the offense.

Varsity League (ages 13 to 18) – The varsity boys will use kick offs and punts to determine ball placement at the exchange of possession of the ball. Kick offs will be made from the kicking teams 10-yard line.

VIII. Line of Scrimmage

- A. Players on the line of scrimmage:
 - 1. The offensive team must have at least three (3) players on the line of scrimmage to begin a play.
 - 2. There must be a one (1) yard space between offensive linemen.
 - 3. All players, with the exception of the center must use a two-point stance. Three point stances are not allowed on either offense or defense.
- B. Only players lined up behind the line of scrimmage may be in motion; limit one player in motion each play. Player in motion must move parallel to or away from line of scrimmage.
- C. Forward handoffs, pitches, tosses and passes are only allowed if the player passing the ball is behind the line of scrimmage.
- D. The defense should line up one yard from the line of scrimmage and cannot move into the neutral zone prior to the snap. An encroachment penalty will be charged for any defensive player stepping into the neutral zone prior to the snap.

IX. Ball Handling

- A. Open field tackling: If the ball carrier is tackled in the open field, ball carrier will be awarded an automatic touchdown.
- B. Bumping-out on the sidelines is not permitted, unless in the judgment of the referee:
 - 1. No block was thrown.
 - 2. Unnecessary roughness is not employed.
 - 3. An attempt to pull the flag is made.
- C. If the ball carrier's flag inadvertently falls off, they may be downed by a one-hand touch by the defense. If any member of the defense pulls flags from offensive players not in possession of the ball intentionally, the offensive team shall be awarded a five (5) yard penalty.

- D. Tackling and carrying ball: The ball carrier may not run through a defensive player (they may not charge) and must attempt to evade the defense whenever possible. The defense may not hold or run through a ball carrier, but must "play the flag" rather than hold the player. In contact between the ball carrier and the defense when both are the aggressors, the ball shall be dead at the spot of contact. The official shall decide those situations just as a basketball referee rules on charging versus blocking.
- E. The ball carrier will be allowed to spin to elude the defense. Runner must have at least one foot on the ground.
- F. A ball carrier may not hurdle, dive, or jump over or through other players in order to score or avoid having flags pulled. If a player is in the open field with only players trailing, he may dive into the end zone. This is the only situation where it is permissible for a ball carrier's feet to leave the ground.
- G. A runner may not use his arms or hands to "shield or guard" flags. The ball carrier is not allowed to use his hands in anyway to impede a defensive player's ability to pull his flags. Stiff-arming, swatting, sweeping, holding, or covering to protect flags is not allowed. A five (5) yard penalty will be charged for "shielding". The penalty will be assessed from the spot of the infraction. If the offense earns a first down based on the spot of the infraction, prior to assessing the penalty, the first down will stand and the penalty will be marked off from the spot of the penalty, making it 1st down and 15 yards for the offense.
- H. Any defensive contact made above a passing quarterback's waist will be considered to be "roughing the passer". A partially deflected or blocked pass does not negate this ruling. Contact below the waist while making an attempt to de-flag the quarterback is permissible. Any type of contact made above the waist of a passing quarterback will result in a five (5) yard penalty and automatic first down for roughing the passer.
- I. A play will be considered dead and a quarterback sacked if the passer's throwing motion has not passed his ear prior to removal of his flag. Note that the ball does not have to be released, but the throwing motion must be past the ear of the quarterback.
- J. Touchbacks - the ball will be put into play at the offensive team's ten (10) yard line. (Interceptions may be advanced out of the end zone.)
- K. The center may adjust the ball, but may not pick it up. If the ball is wet or placed improperly the referee's assistance is required to adjust or dry the ball.
- L. The defense may not bump or push an offensive player out-of-bounds. If an offensive player is bumped out of bounds by the defense, he does not lose eligibility to receive the ball. A penalty for illegal contact will be called on the defense. The offense will have the choice to accept the penalty or the forward progress of the play. Illegal contact on the defense results in a 5-yard penalty from the line of scrimmage and the offense is allowed to repeat the down.
- M. If an offensive player goes out-of-bounds of his own accord then returns to the playing field to catch a pass, the offense will be penalized for having an ineligible receiver on the field. The infraction will result in a 5-yard penalty with a loss of down.
- N. The defense cannot cross the line of scrimmage before the snap. An encroachment penalty will be assessed for any defensive player that steps into the neutral zone prior to the snap of the football.
- O. All fumbled balls are dead immediately. Exception: Beginner League (ages 6 to 10) quarterbacks are allowed to pick up a bad or dropped hike that touches the ground. The quarterback is the only player that can pick up the ball. If any other offensive or defensive player touches the ball, it is dead at the spot of contact. If the quarterback drops the ball on a handoff or pitch it is dead. It can only be picked up on the snap. This exception is only for the Beginner League quarterbacks.
- P. With the exception of balls fumbled forward, all fumbled balls will be marked down at the point of contact with the field. Balls fumbled forward will be moved back to the spot where the offensive player last had possession.

X. Punting

- A. Punting rules are specific to HFL age brackets.

Beginner League (ages 6 to 10) – Because each possession will consist of four (4) downs with the ball being put into play 10 yards from the defense’s goal line, there is no punting of any kind in the Beginner League. The offense has four (4) downs to score. If the offense does not score, the ball is turned over to the opposing team.

Youth League (ages 9 to 15) – On all fourth down situations, the offense has the right to “punt the ball” or go for the first down. If the offense attempts to gain the yardage necessary for a first down and is not successful, the ball is turned over to the defense at the spot of forward progress. If, in a fourth-down situation, the offense opts to punt, the coach or players will notify the referee of the team’s intent to punt and the possession of the ball will be given to the defense. The ball will be spotted on the ten (10) yard line of the team receiving the punt. There is no actual “punt”, only a change of possession with the ball being moved to the 10-yard line of the team gaining possession of the ball.

Varsity League (ages 13 to 18) – The offensive team must notify the referee whenever they desire to punt. Neither team may cross the line of scrimmage until the ball is punted. The defense must maintain three players on the line of scrimmage and they may not attempt to block the punt. Teams may return punts from the end zone provided the ball is not dropped during or after the catch. If the ball is dropped in the end zone, it will result in a touchback with the ball being put into play at the receiving team's ten (10) yard line. A punt that does not reach the end zone may be picked up (off the ground) and advanced provided the ball was not mishandled during the catch. For clarification purposes, the ball must not touch a player and then fall to the ground. If a player touches the ball and it falls to the ground, it is dead.

XI. Scoring

- A. Scoring shall be six (6) points for a touchdown and one (1) point for the extra point conversion from the two (2) yard line and two (2) points for extra point conversion from the five (5) yard line.
- B. Two (2) points will be awarded to the defensive teams returning the ball for a touchdown if they intercept the ball while the offense is attempting extra point conversion.
- C. When the flag is pulled, the position of the runner's hip shall determine placement of the ball, unless ball has crossed goal line resulting in a touchdown. If the nose of the ball crosses the goal line, even if the player does not, a touchdown will be awarded.
- D. Forward motion of the ball carrier into the end zone after flag has been pulled is not counted as a touchdown. The ball is downed at the point where the flag is pulled free.
- D. A safety is scored when the defense causes play to stop with an offensive player being tackled in his own end zone or when the offense fumbles the ball into its own end zone. Offensive penalties occurring while the ball carrier is still in his own end zone will also result in a safety. Two (2) points are awarded for a safety. Following a safety, the defense will also be awarded possession of the football. The placement of the football will be as follows:

Beginner League (ages 6 to 10) – Offense will lose possession of the ball. If the team receiving credit for the safety has not received a four (4) down possession in the period being played, the ball will be placed, as usual, on the opposing teams ten (10) yard line. If the safety is score in the second possession of a period, the period will end. Each team will only receive one possession in each period.

Youth League (ages 9 to 15) – Possession of the football will be awarded to the defense on their ten (10) yard line. The change of possession is treated as a “kick off or punt”.

Varsity League (ages 13 to 18) – The defense will be awarded possession of the ball. The offense will be granted a “free kick” and may choose to kick or punt the football from their own ten (10) yard line.

E. A forfeited game will be recorded as 5– 0.

XII. Penalties

A. Loss of down and yardage for the following violations:

1. Illegal forward pass 5 yards
2. Offensive pass interference 5 yards
3. Illegal receiver on field 5 yards
4. Shielding/Flag guarding 5 yards

B. Loss of 5 yards:

1. Delay of the game
2. Illegal substitution
3. Offside
4. False start or any illegal act by snapper
5. Free-kick infractions
6. Illegal forward pitch - point of infraction
7. Not enough players on the line of scrimmage
8. Illegal motion
9. Team box violation - 1st offense
10. Encroachment
11. Illegal persons on field (too many)
12. Illegal use of hand/arm
13. Kicking, tripping, tackling, clipping
14. Illegal blocking
15. Pushing the ball carrier
16. Intentionally de-flagging a player other than the ball carrier
17. Defensive pass interference
18. Illegal team/personal action or conduct*

*The intent of this penalty is to warn players/coaches that their action(s) are escalating towards unsportsmanlike conduct.

C. Loss of 15 yards:

1. Unsportsmanlike conduct
2. Impure speech

E. Any distance penalty shall be no greater than half the distance to the goal line.

F. No contact blocking by the offense or use of the hands by the defense. This is a non-contact league.