



**WEST HARTFORD YOUTH FOOTBALL  
USA FOOTBALL / NFL FLAG FOOTBALL RULES**

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THE FOLLOWING RULES WERE ESTABLISHED USING THE USA FOOTBALL / NFL FLAG RULES AS A BASELINE. SOME RULES HAVE BEEN MODIFIED TO ACCOMMODATE PLAY AT THE YOUNGER DIVISIONS.

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## NFL Flag standard

WHYFL Variant – based on benchmarking with Farmington Valley

### I. Game

- At the start of each game, captains (chosen by coaches before each game) 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. There are no Kick offs or punts at any time.
- The winner of the coin toss has the choice of offense or defense. The loser of the coin toss has the choice of direction. Possession changes to start the second half to the team that started the game on defense. [OR] 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. \*[NFL Flag rules have three (3) plays]
- If the offense fails to score, the ball changes possession and the new offensive team starts its drive on its own 5-yard line.
- If the offensive team fails to cross midfield, possession of the ball changes and the opposition starts its drive from its own 5-yard line.
- All possession changes, except interceptions, start on the offense's 5-yard line.
- Teams change sides after the first half. Possession changes to the team that started the game on defense.

### II. Terminology

Term	Definition
Boundary Lines	The outer perimeter lines around the field. They include the sidelines and back of the end zone lines.
Line of Scrimmage	(LOS) an imaginary line running through the point of the football and across the width of the field.
Line-to-Gain	The line the offense must pass to get a first down or score.
Rush Line	An imaginary line running across the width of the field seven yards (into the defensive side) from the line of scrimmage.
Offense	The team with possession of the ball.
Defense	The team opposing the offense to prevent it from advancing the ball.
Passer	The offensive player that throws the ball and may or may not be the quarterback.
Rusher	The defensive player assigned to rush the quarterback to prevent him/ her from passing the ball by pulling his/her flags or by blocking the pass.

Downs (1-2-3)	The offensive team has three attempts or “downs” to advance the ball. It must cross the line to gain to get another set of downs or to score.
Live Ball	Refers to the period of time that the play is in action. Generally used in regard to penalties. Live ball penalties are considered part of the play and must be enforced before the down is considered complete.
Dead Ball	Refers to the period of time immediately before or after a play.
Whistle	Sound made by an official using a whistle that signifies the end of the play or a stop in the action for a timeout, halftime or the end of the game.
Inadvertent Whistle	Official’s whistle that is performed in error.
Charging	An illegal movement of the ball-carrier directly at a defensive player who has established position on the field. This includes lowering the head or initiating contact with a shoulder, forearm or the chest.
Flag Guarding	An illegal act by the ball-carrier to prevent a defender from pulling the ball-carrier’s flags by stiff arm, lowering elbow or head or by blocking access to the runner’s flags with a hand or arm.
Shovel Pass	A legal pitch attempted beyond the line of scrimmage.
Lateral	A backward or sideways toss of the ball by the ball-carrier.
Unsportsmanlike Conduct	A rude, confrontational or offensive behavior or language.

### III. Eligibility

All players’ must:

- be attending a school grade from 1st through 8th during the season of play
- have had a legal guardian complete one of the WHYFL’s online registration programs and agree to the NFL FLAG online waiver form before participating.

### IV. Equipment

- Players must wear the Jersey/Uniform and 2-Flag Belt supplied by the WHYFL. Jerseys must not be cut or altered in any way.
- Teams must play all WHYFL games with the Official NFL Game Football inflated to the recommended PSI designated for each league as follows:
  - 1st - 4th Grade Leagues = NFL FLAG labeled Blue Football (WTF1812, K2 Pattern);
  - 4th-8th Grade Leagues = NFL FLAG Labeled Brown Football (Wilson WTF1305, Youth Size);
- Players must wear shoes. Football cleats are encouraged; however cleats with exposed metal are not allowed and must be removed.

- Players may tape their forearms, hands and fingers. Players may wear gloves, elbow pads, and kneepads. Braces with exposed metals are not allowed.
- Mouthpieces are required.
- Players must remove all watches, earrings and any other jewelry that the officials deem hazardous.
- Players' jerseys must be tucked into the pants with the flag belt and socket attaching flag to belt exposed and on each side of the player at all times.

## V. Field

- Unless otherwise directed by the WHYFL all regular-season and playoff games will be played at one of our 3 fields located at Sterling Field.
- Official NFL FLAG Football field dimensions are 30 yards wide by 70 yards long including two 10 yard end zones, and a midfield line-to-gain. No-Run Zones precede each line-to-gain by 5 yards. FVFFL fields mirror these dimensions.
- 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, even with a handoff. **\*[1st-2nd Grade League may still conduct run plays in the No-Run Zones]**
- Stepping on the boundary line is considered out of bounds.
- Each offensive squad approaches only TWO No-Run Zones in each drive (one zone 5 yards from midfield to gain the first down, and one zone 5 yards from the goal line to score a TD). **\*[1st-2nd Grade League may still conduct run plays in the No-Run Zones]**



## VI. Rosters

- Home teams wear dark color jerseys; visiting teams wear light color jerseys.
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- Teams must consist of at least five players, with a maximum of 10 players. [Teams may exceed maximum within reason to accommodate players who register after deadline.]
- Teams must start a game with five (5) players. In the event of an injury, a team with insufficient substitute players may play with four (4) players on the field, but no fewer than four.
- \*If a team has seven (7) or more players on its roster for a particular game then no one player is allowed to play every down and the ball should be distributed fairly among players. [WHYFL Fair Play Rule]

## VII. Timing and Overtime

1. Games are played on a \*forty-four (44) minute continuous clock with two twenty-two (22) minute halves up to the final two (2) minutes of each half when the referee stops the clock for a \*"2-minute warning" after which the
  - a. \*clock stops for:
    - i. incomplete passes (including QB "Spiking the ball")
    - ii. ball carrier stepping out of bounds
    - iii. administering a penalty (resuming immediately except if previous play was a or b above)
    - iv. touchdowns and extra point plays
    - v. Note: The clock never stops for fumbles
    - vi. The clock also stops for timeouts.
2. Halftime is 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. \*[1st-2nd Grade Leagues have 40 seconds to snap the ball]
4. Each team has one 60-second time out 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.
7. If the score is tied at the end of 44 minutes during a regular-season game, the game will be scored a tie.
8. \*In playoff situations, an overtime (OT) Period will be used to determine a winner. OT format is as follows:

- a. Each team is given opportunity to score from the twenty (20) yard line (5 yards closer than midfield to the goal line).
- b. Coin toss determine first possession (choice).
- c. Loser of coin toss determines which goal to defend.
- d. Each team is required to score in the same direction.
- e. Team that scores more points in a particular round wins.

## VIII. Scoring

1. Touchdown: 6 points
2. PAT (Point After Touchdown) 1 point (5 yard line) or 2 points (10 yard line)

Note: 1 point PAT is pass only, 2 point PAT can be run or pass. **\*[1st Grade League PAT from 5-yard line only. 1 point for run or 2 points for a pass]**

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 10-yard line). Any change, once a decision is made to try for the extra point, requires a charged time out. Decision cannot be changed after a penalty. Interceptions on conversions cannot be returned. **\*[1st Grade League exempt]**

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. A Safety also occurs when there is an offensive penalty in the end zone.
4. **Lopsided game scores of 25 points or more should be avoided at all times in any game. Teams must limit the use of 'stronger' players in key positions once a lopsided score is reached.**

[or]

**After one team is winning by 28 points or more, the game is over. Once a 28 or more point advantage is gained, no PAT will be attempted. The game will continue in scrimmage mode for remainder of the game.**

5. **Forfeits are scored 28-0 for the winning team.**

## IX. Coaches

1. Coaches are volunteer parents (or legal guardians) instructing players in non-contact football fundamentals helping them to learn and enjoy the game of football. Parents are encouraged to support the coach at all time.

2. No coaches are permitted on the playing field at any time during a game and must remain on the sidelines at all times unless called out on the field by a referee. Coaches are encouraged to call or signal in plays from the sidelines, but may also have team huddle towards their sideline. \*(1-2nd and 3-4th Grade League coaches may be on the field to direct players.)
3. At the expense of the WHYFL and before each season all coaches are required to:
  1. pass a background check
  2. complete the NFL FLAG online Level-1 Coaching Training and Certification Course
  3. attend a mandatory coaches meeting where league rules and policy will be reviewed
4. Coaches are expected to adhere to NFL FLAG and WHYFL philosophies, coaching guidelines, codes of conduct, and especially the WHYFL Fair Play Rules.

## **X. 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.
  - a. It is an automatic dead ball foul if any player on defense or offense enters the neutral zone. In regard to 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.
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 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.
5. Substitutions may be made on any dead ball.
6. Any official can whistle the play dead.
7. 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.
  - g. The receiver catches the ball while in possession of one or no flag(s).
  - h. The 7 second pass clock expires.
  - i. Inadvertent whistle.

NOTE: There are no fumbles. The ball is spotted where the ball carrier's feet were at the time of the fumble.

8. In the case of an inadvertent whistle, the offense has two options:
  - a. Take the ball where it was when the whistle blew and the down is consumed.
  - b. Replay the down from the original line of scrimmage.

## **XI. 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. Forward progress will be measured by the player's front foot.
2. The quarterback cannot directly run with the ball. The quarterback does have the ability to scramble in the back field, but cannot advance the ball beyond the line of scrimmage. The quarterback is the offensive player that receives the snap.
3. Only direct 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.
  - a. "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.
  - b. \*No one player can carry the football across the line of scrimmage on a 'running play' more than twice on any series of Downs. This limitation does not apply to 'passing plays'. Violation of this rule will result in a 5-yard penalty from the line of scrimmage and loss of down. [WHYFL Fair Play Rule]
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, and one 5 yards from the goal line to score a TD). \*[1st-2nd Grade League may still conduct run plays in the No-Run Zones]
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, behind or to the side of the quarterback, all defensive players are eligible to rush.
8. Runners may not leave their feet to advance the ball. Diving, leaping, or jumping to avoid a flag pull is considered flag guarding.

9. 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.
10. 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.
11. No blocking or “screening” is allowed at any time.
12. Offensive players must stop their motion once the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage. No running with the ball carrier.
13. 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.

## **XII. Passing**

1. All passes must be from behind the line of scrimmage, thrown forward and received beyond the line of scrimmage.
  - a. All passes that do not cross the line of scrimmage, whether received or not, are illegal forward passes.
  - b. The quarterback may throw the ball away to avoid a sack. Pass must go beyond the line of scrimmage.
2. Shovel passes are allowed, but must be received beyond the line of scrimmage.
3. The quarterback has a seven (7) second “pass clock.” If a pass is not thrown within the seven (7) 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.
4. Referee’s whistle will denote the expiry of the 7 second pass clock and play dead unless ball was thrown before start of whistle (1-2-3-4-5-6-7-WHISTLE)
5. 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 (LOS).

### **XIII. Receiving**

1. All players are eligible to receive passes (including the quarterback, if the ball has been handed off behind the line of scrimmage).
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 a 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.
5. Interceptions change the possession of the ball at the point of interception. Interceptions are the only changes of possession that do not start on the 5-yard line.
6. Interceptions are returnable but not on conversions after touchdowns.

### **XIV. Rushing the Passer**

1. All players who rush the passer must be a minimum of **\*ten (10)** yards from the line of scrimmage ('Rush Line') 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.
2. Once the ball is handed off, the ten (10) 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 ten (10) 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. Any rush from a point 10 yards from the defensive line of scrimmage.
    - 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 (breaks the 10 yard area), 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 crosses the line of scrimmage before a handoff or pass – Illegal Rush (5 yards LOS and first down).
    - ii. Any defensive player crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped – Offside (5 yards LOS and first down).

- iii. Any defensive player, not lined up at the rush line crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is passed or handed off – Illegal Rush (5 yards LOS and first down).
  - c. Special Circumstances
    - i. Teams are not required to rush the quarterback, seven (7) second clock in effect.
    - ii. Teams are not required to identify their rusher before they play, however, if they do send a rusher, the rusher must verify with the official that they are in the correct position.
    - iii. If rusher leaves the 10-yard Rush Line before the snap, he/she may immediately drop back to act as 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 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.
- 5. The offense cannot impede the rusher in any way. The rusher has the right to a clear path to the quarterback, regardless of where they line up prior to the snap. If the “path or line” is occupied by a moving offensive player, then it is the offense’s responsibility to avoid the rusher. Any disruption to the rusher’s path and/or contact will result in an impeding the rusher penalty. **If the offensive player does not move after the snap, then it is the rusher’s responsibility to go around the offensive player and to avoid contact.**
- 6. 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 flag is pulled.
  - a. A Safety is awarded if the sack takes place in the offensive team’s end zone.

## XV. 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 the ball carrier when pulling flags.
3. It is illegal to attempt to strip or pull the ball from the ball carrier’s possession 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.
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 the head, hand, arm or shoulder, or intentionally covering the flags with the football jersey.

## **XVI. Formations**

1. Offense 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 behind and parallel to the line of scrimmage.
  - b. No motion is allowed towards the line of scrimmage.
2. 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.
3. The center must snap the ball to a player in the backfield either by a traditional snap through the legs, shotgun snap, direct handoff, or underhand toss. All snaps must start with the ball on the ground.

## **XVII. Unsportsmanlike Conduct**

1. If any referee or the referee supervisor witnesses any acts of intentional tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, blocking or any unsportsmanlike act, the game will be stopped and at the sole discretion of the referee or referee supervisor any one of the following may occur: verbal warning, Unsportsmanlike penalty assessed; or the player or players involved will be ejected from the game. No appeals will be considered. **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, coach 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, as well:
  - a. Yell to cheer on players, not to harass officials or other teams.
  - b. Cheer only for players' success and not their failure. For example, cheer a defender who makes a play to disrupt a reception, but don't cheer if a receiver simply drops a passed ball.
  - c. Keep comments clean and profanity free.

- d. Compliment ALL players, not just one child or team.
7. Fans are required to:
    - a. Take a viewing position in the designated 'Home' or 'Visitor' area on the same side of the playing field adjacent to the opposing team (check with your team's coach if in doubt).
    - b. Keep fields safe and kids friendly
    - c. Keep younger kids and equipment such as coolers, chairs and tents a safe distance from the playing field.
  8. Unsportsmanlike behavior – as determined by the game referee(s) and referee supervisor - from any coach or fan will not be tolerated and will be subject to the following:
    - a. Initially coaches from both teams will be brought to midfield for a formal verbal warning. If after this verbal warning a similar infraction occurs again during the game then;
    - b. Unsportsmanlike penalty assessed for each occurrence after the official verbal warning was delivered. Subsequent offenses may also include ejection. All of these unsportsmanlike penalties will be raised to the FVFFL board where further action may be taken.

## **XVIII. Penalties**

### **i. General**

1. Any referee or the referee supervisor will call all penalties.
2. Referees determine incidental contact that may result from normal run of play.
3. All penalties will be assessed from the line of scrimmage, except as noted. (spot fouls)
4. Only the head coach may question the referee about rule clarification and interpretations. A coach not satisfied with the referee's explanation may ask for the referee supervisor who will make the final call, but coaches must never aggressively confront our referees. Players may not question judgment calls.
5. Games may not end on a defensive penalty, unless the offense declines it.
6. Penalties are assessed live ball then dead ball. Live ball penalties must be assessed before play is considered complete.
7. Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal yardage when the penalty yardage is more than half the distance to the goal.

### **ii. Spot fouls**

Defensive pass interference	Automatic first down
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Holding	Automatic first down
Stripping	+10 yards and automatic first down
Defensive unnecessary roughness	+10 yards and automatic first down
Screening, Blocking or Running with the Ball Carrier	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Charging	-10 yards & Loss of Down
Flag Guarding	-10 yards & Loss of Down
Offensive unnecessary roughness	-10 yards and loss of down

### iii. Defensive Penalties

Offside	+5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Illegal rush (Starting rush from inside 10-yard marker)	+5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Illegal flag pull (Before the receiver has the ball)	+5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Roughing the passer	+10 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Taunting	+10 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Defensive pass interference	Automatic first down
Holding	Automatic first down
Stripping	+10 yards and automatic first down
Defensive unnecessary roughness	+10 yards and automatic first down
Defensive Unsportsmanlike conduct	+15 yards and automatic first down
Roughing the passer	+10 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down

### iv. Offensive penalties

Offside / false start	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Illegal forward pass (Any pass received or lands behind the line of scrimmage or throwing a pass after crossing the line of scrimmage)	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Offensive pass interference	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Illegal motion (More than one person moving)	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Delay of game	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Impeding the rusher	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Same Rusher more than twice on any one down series <b>[Fair Play Rule]</b>	- 5 yards from line of scrimmage & Loss of Down
Screening, Blocking, or Running with the Ball Carrier	SPOT FOUL -5 yards & loss of down
Offensive unnecessary roughness	SPOT FOUL, -10 yards and loss of down

Offensive unsportsmanlike conduct	SPOT FOUL ,-10 yards and loss of down
Charging	SPOT FOUL, -10 yards & Loss of Down
Flag Guarding	SPOT FOUL, -15 yards & Loss of Down

\*Deviation from standard NFL FLAG Football Rules