

## **Flag Football**

### **The field:**

The following field dimensions and markings are recommended for games with teams of 11 players:

- Length: 60 (or 80) metres
- Width: 30 (or 40) metres
- End zones: maximum 10 metres long, minimum 7 metres long
- No-running zones: must be marked at a distance of 5 metres from the goal lines.

For games with teams of fewer than 11 players the field should be shorter and in particular, slightly narrower.

Markings representing the 10-yard lines, do not necessarily have to be exactly 10 yards (or 10 metres) apart from one other. To start with, a distance of approx. 5 metres is (more) sensible as it is more motivating. Teams find it easier, to reach the 10 yards with four downs. The length of the field does not necessarily have to correspond to exactly 9 markings.

Marking cones / plates are particularly suitable for marking out the field. If nothing else is available, a sufficient number of old bibs will do. If you do not have enough of these either, rucksacks and sports bags (no bottles inside, of course) can be used. Do not use poles for marking (risk of injury!).

The end zones should be clearly marked. The easiest solution is to 'decorate' the marking cones / plates for the end zones with bibs in the colour of the respective defending team. Marking cones / plates of a different colour can also be used for the end zones.

If no points are scored despite all the lovely decoration, simply take away a couple of markings at both ends to shorten the field. This does away with a lot of the toing and froing around the middle line, the game automatically moves towards the end zones.

For indoor flag football in a sports hall, the field should be 40 metres long and approx. 18 metres wide (if possible).

### **Goals:**

Flag football is best played with rugby goals. However, it can be played with football goals. (Smaller) football goals can be placed at the rear end of the end zones. A field goal is scored when the ball goes over the football goal's crossbar between the imaginary lines extending above the goal posts.

## **NFL flag football rules**

NFL flag football is a non-contact sport. Blocking other players or tackling them to the ground is no permitted.

### **1. Ball possession:**

- First ball possession is determined by the toss of a coin. The winner of the toss gets the right to put the ball in play first. The loser shall designate which goal line his team will first defend.
- At the beginning of the second half, the team losing the toss will put the ball in play at their own 5-metre line.
- There are no kick-offs.
- The offense puts the ball in play at the 5-metre line and has four plays to cross the middle line. Once the offense has crossed the middle line, they have four more plays to score a touchdown. If the offense cannot score, possession of the ball changes and the new offense puts the ball in play at their own 5-metre line. An automatic first down due to a penalty overrides all other requirements – four plays for a first down or a touchdown.
- If the offense cannot cross the middle line, possession of the ball changes and the new offense puts the ball in play at their own 5-metre line.

- All changes of possession start at their own 5-metre line, except for interceptions.
- Teams change sides after the first 20 minutes.

## 2. Number of players

- Teams in official NFL competitions consist of 6 players (5 on the field, 1 substitute). They can consist of 7 players (5 on the field, 2 substitutes) if one of the players is female.
- Teams in official EFAF competitions consist of 10 players (5 on the field and 5 substitutes).
- Teams can continue to play with a minimum of 4 players (due to injuries).
- If a team has fewer than 4 players, play is abandoned and the game counts as a loss for this team.

## 3. Playing time / overtime:

- The playing time is 40 minutes (two halves of 20 minutes each)
- The game clock runs continuously with the exception of the last 2 minutes of each half. It is operated by an official timekeeper. The clock is stopped when the ball carrier goes out of bounds or a pass is incomplete. The clock is NOT stopped after each play. The players will learn to deal with the game clock as it is common in professional American football.
- Flag football is a tool for learning the processes of regular American football.
- Referees can stop the clock at their discretion.
- When a game is tied after regular time, overtime is played. There is a 2-minute break between the end of regular time and overtime. A coin toss decides first ball possession in overtime. The team that wins the toss puts the ball in play at their own 5-metre line. There is normal play until one of the teams scores. There are no timeouts in overtime.
- Once the referee has placed the ball, the offense has 30 seconds to snap the ball.
- Each team is entitled to two timeouts of 60 seconds per half. These cannot be carried over to the second half or overtime.
- Only the head coach or players on the field can call for a timeout.
- The game clock is stopped during a timeout.
- The game clock is stopped to give the teams a 2-minute warning before the end of each half. (This is not an timeout. The game clock starts immediately after both teams have been informed.)
- There is a 2-minute break between the two halves.
- After the game clock has been stopped, it is restarted at the snap.

## 4. Scores:

- **Touchdown: 6 points**

- **Extra point: 1 point** for a successful try from exactly 5 metres
- **Extra point: 2 points** for a successful try from exactly 12 metres
- **Safety: 2 points** (when the opposition ball carrier's flag is pulled in their own end zone)
- **Special situation:** if the defense intercepts the ball during an extra point (1 or 2 points) and carries it back to the opposite end zone, the team scores **2 points** and wins the right to put the ball in play at their own 5-yard line.

#### 5. Running:

- The centre must snap the ball through his legs to start a play.
- The centre is the player who passes the ball to the quarterback with a snap. The centre must not directly receive the ball back from the quarterback (no centre sneak play).
- The quarterback is the player who first receives the ball through a direct snap from the centre.
- The quarterback must not run with the ball over the line of scrimmage, unless he has handed over the ball or passed it backward and then received it back.
- The offense may pass the ball several times behind the line of scrimmage. During a play only lateral and backward passes are allowed.
- Tosses are allowed as they are running plays.
- Once the attacking player has crossed the line of scrimmage, the ball must not be handed over or passed backwards.
- There are no-running zones 5 metres in front of each end zone. When the ball is placed 5 metres or less from the opposition's end zone, the offense must not make a running play.
- An attacking player who has received the ball through direct handing or a backward pass, may throw a forward pass as long as he has not crossed the line of scrimmage.
- After direct or feinted ball handing, a toss or during play action, all defenders may attack the offense's rear area.
- Ball carriers may escape a defender by turning. However, they are not allowed to escape by jumping or to gain additional metres by jumping (no diving).
- The ball is placed where the ball carrier's feet are at the moment of the flag being pulled, not where the ball is.

#### 6. Catching:

- All players may catch passes (including the quarterback after he has handed-over the ball behind the line of scrimmage or has thrown it backwards (toss)).
- Just like in the NFL, only one player from each team is allowed to be in motion before the start of the play. The player is not allowed to move forward at the time of the snap.
- For a valid catch, a player must have at least one foot in the field when catching the ball.

#### 7. Throwing:

- Only players who position themselves before the snap 7 metres from the line of scrimmage are allowed to run across the line of scrimmage towards the quarterback when a pass is played.

- The quarterback has 7 seconds to throw a pass. If the ball is not thrown within 7 seconds, the play is over, the offense lose one of their plays and the ball is placed at the previous scrimmaging line.
- During a play, only one forward pass which has to be thrown from behind the line of scrimmage is allowed.
- Ball possession changes at an interception.
- Interceptions may be carried back by the defense.
- If the ball is intercepted in the end zone and not carried out, the play is over and the intercepting team put the ball in play at their own 5-metre line. If the ball is intercepted in the end zone and the ball carrier leaves the end zone, the intercepting team put the ball in play at the point where the ball carrier was stopped. However, if the ball carrier returns into their own end zone and has either a flag pulled or the play is stopped there, the other team get a safety.

### 8. End of a play:

- Substitutions shall only be made after the end of a play.
- A play is over when:
  - one referee blows the whistle.
  - the ball carrier has a flag pulled or becomes illegal.
  - points have been scored.
  - the ball carrier goes out of bounds.
  - the ball carrier touches the ground with a part of their body other than feet and hands.
- If the ball carrier loses a flag, the referee stops the play and the next play starts at the point where the flag was lost.
- Players who have lost a flag are no longer allowed to catch a pass.

Note: There are no fumbles. The ball is placed at the point where it has left the hand of the ball carrier . If the ball is dropped during the snap, it is placed on the line of scrimmage.



### 9. Rushing the quarterback:

All defenders who want to prevent the quarterback from throwing and pull his flag (rush) must be positioned at least 7 metres from the line of scrimmage at the start of the play. Any number of defenders may rush the quarterback. Players who do not rush the quarterback may stand directly at the line of scrimmage. The 7-metre rule is void for plays with direct handing, toss, a trick play or feinted handing. All players may cross the line of scrimmage.

At the start of a play, one referee positions themselves 7 metres away from the line of scrimmage in order to indicate the distance to the defenders.

**IMPORTANT: Blocking and tackling are not allowed.**

### 10. Fairness

- If the referee sees an attempted tackle, a push with an elbow or any other unfair action, the game is stopped and the player is excluded from the entire tournament. Unfair playing is not tolerated.
- Any player who insults another participant is penalized by the referees. (Insults include offensive remarks towards the referee, opposition players, teams or spectators.) After a warning, insults are also penalized by exclusion.



### 11. Penalties:

- Every foul attracts a 5-metre penalty. The play is repeated, unless stated otherwise, and the penalty is always measured from the line of scrimmage.
- All penalties may be declined, apart from the 'false start' as no play has been made.
- Penalties cannot be longer than half the distance from the line of scrimmage to the end zone.
- If a contact was purely accidental during normal play is at the discretion of the referee.
- Only the team captain and the head coach may approach the head referee for questions regarding interpretation or explanation of rules. Players or coaches may not question a referee's decision.
- A game cannot end with a penalty against the defense unless the offense declines the penalty.
- Penalties after an interception are measured from the point of the interception after the run has been completed and/or the play is over.

#### Defensive penalties

- **Offside – 5 metre** (crossing the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped)
- **Illegal substitution – 5 metre** (player runs onto the field to confuse the opposition after the whistle for the snap or 6 players are on the field)
- **Disconcerting calls – 5 metres** (e.g. starting signals before the snap or calls to confuse the opponent)
- **Interference with an opponent or the ball at the snap – 5 metres**
- **Illegal Rushing – 5 metres** (rushing the quarterback from within the 7-metre marking)
- **Interference – 5 metres plus automatic first down** (interference with catching)



- **Illegal contact – 5 metres plus automatic first down** (holding, blocking etc.)
- **Illegal flag pull – 5 metres plus automatic first down** (Flag pulling before ball is caught)

#### Offensive penalties

- **Flag guarding – 5 metres** (protecting the flag)
- **Delay of game – 5 metres** (exceeding the consulting time)
- **Illegal substitution – 5 metres** (see defensive penalties)
- **Illegal motion – 5 metres** (more than one player is moving at the snap)
- **False start – 5 metres** (cannot be declined)
- **Illegal snap – 5 metres** (e.g. the ball is picked up and put down again)
- **Illegal shift – 5 metres** (player was standing still for less than a second)
- **Offensive holding – 5 metres** (holding an opposing player)
- **Diving / jumping – 5 metres**
- **Player runs out of bounds – 5 metres** (if a player runs out of bounds by themselves, they must not run back onto the field to catch the ball)

- **Illegal forward pass – 5 metres plus loss of a play** (a second forward pass, or the ball is thrown by a player who has already crossed the line of scrimmage.)
- **Offensive pass interference – 5 metres plus loss of a play** (illegal blocking of an opposing player, pushing off a defender)
- **Running inside the no-running-zones – loss of a play, no metre penalty**

#### 12. Tournament tie breaker system:

1. Head to head result
2. Total net point difference
3. Play overtime

#### 13. Clothing:

- Wearing body protection or head gear is not permitted.
- Studs are allowed only if they are made from rubber. This must be checked before each game.
- All players have to wear a mouth guard; there are no exceptions.
- During matches, official tournament jerseys must be worn.

#### Player equipment:

The flags (40-50 cm long) shall hang down freely and not be covered by t-shirts, jumpers, jackets or similar. If possible, the teams should be equipped as follows: Wear yellow team jerseys (and tuck into shorts), tuck red flags into shorts and let them hang down. The other team wears the reversed colour combination. In addition to the bibs, marking bands, small towels and (old) pieces of cloth are suitable as flags. In order to prevent the line players from gripping one another, players can bring their mittens. If the thumbs are knotted, the player can only get their open hand into the mitten and therefore can't grip.

#### Playing equipment:

The professional footballs are of course made from leather. However, balls made from rubber or synthetic leather are perfectly suitable for use in schools. In addition, they have two advantages: they offer better grip (particularly the rubber balls) and are much cheaper. At the very least, do not buy footballs that have an imitation rubber seam, as they can't be thrown properly.

#### Referee:

If the whistle is blown at the beginning and end of each play, there is less disturbance and it is easier to explain the rules.

#### Flag football modifications:

Flag football can even be played as a passing game only. This is particularly attractive but only suitable for teams with good technical skills.

Alternatively, the positions in the game can be swapped following a distinct plan. This promotes team spirit.

Most modifications relate to kicking and scoring. If the field is relatively small, it is recommended to play without field goals and the point. Simply make all four plays and then change ball possession if necessary. The kick-off can be made from the own baseline. This allows this element to be retained in the game even on small fields.

Flag football can even be played with fewer than 11 players per team. If there are 6 - 8 players per team, the line positions should be reduced in favour of the field players.

If there are fewer than 6 players per team, there should be only one direction of play.

**The most important techniques:**

A popular saying from coaches is, "There are only three problems in American football: throwing, catching, kicking." The following advice describes the most important phases of the three techniques:

**Throwing:**

Grip the football slightly behind the middle, the fingers grip the laces of the ball.

The white cross stripes help with orientation. The index finger should sit very close to the stripe.

Bring the ball back into throwing position with both hands on the ball and place your body weight onto your rear leg.

The throwing movement is very similar to that in handball and javelin.

It is extremely important to create a rotation on the ball's long axis when throwing. This is achieved by explosively 'pulling' the hand underneath the ball during the last phase of the throw. It is therefore important that the fingers grip the seam as the fingers will now pull the seam down thus creating the rotation.

**Catching:**

The football should not be caught standing and in a frontal position but, if possible, in a backward-lateral movement. This enables the player to 'suck in' the speed of the flying ball

and (after a 90 degree turn) to immediately continue the run towards the opposite end zone without losing too much speed. During catching, the ball is brought closely to the body and gripped firmly.

**Kicking:**

The following applies to punting and the kick-off:

The seam points in the direction of play. The football is held vertically and leaning backwards towards the player.

The kicking technique is basically that of a football volley kick.