

Youth League & Tournament Series



Official Rules

Created January 2026
Updated January 2026

5v5 NC RULES (All Divisions)

Game Format

- Two 12-minute halves.
- Running clock until the final 1:00 of the 2nd half, then Pro Clock Rules apply.
- Each team receives 2 timeouts per game (30 seconds).
- Mercy Rule (second half only): A 21+ point lead ends the game. When a team leads by 21+ points with under 5 minutes to go, the opposing team will have one chance to lower the margin. If they fail to score, the game ends.
- Play Clock: The offense has 25 seconds to snap the ball once it is spotted.
- Coin Toss: Winner chooses offense/defense or direction; choice alternates at halftime.
- Minimum 4 players required to start a game.

Field & Rosters

- Field Dimensions: 60 yards long x 25 yards wide. End Zones: 7 yards
- First down marker: Midfield (23-yard line)
- Maximum roster size: 15 players
- No outside substitutes allowed. All players must be on the roster.

Equipment & Uniforms

- Only pop flags (2 flags) allowed.
- No altered or triple-threat flags.
- Pocketless shorts required.
- Flags must contrast with shorts.
- Cleats allowed (no metal spikes).
- Teams supply appropriately sized footballs per division.
- Matching team jerseys with visible, non-duplicated numbers required.
- Jerseys must remain tucked in and may not cover flags.
- Stats tracked only for properly uniformed rostered players. (only for applicable formats)

Downs & Drives

- 3 downs to advance the ball to midfield.
- After reaching midfield, 3 downs to score.
- Interceptions may be returned.
- Defensive return on conversion = 2 points.
- No kickoffs. Possessions begin at the team's own 5-yard line.



Onside Attempt

- Available any time in the second half while trailing. No limit on attempts as long as team is trailing.
- One play from the team's own 5-yard line to reach or pass midfield.
- Success: Offense retains possession at the dead-ball spot.
- Failure: Defense takes over at the dead-ball spot.
- Touchdowns scored on onside attempts count normally.

Passing & Receiving

- All players are eligible receivers.
- Ball must be snapped between the legs.
- One foot in bounds required for a catch.
- No bump/press coverage allowed.
- Arena motion is legal.
- Laterals are allowed anywhere on the field.

Running

- Offense cannot run unless the ball has been handed off or lateraled prior.
- Unlimited handoffs and pitches behind the line of scrimmage.
- No diving or flipping with the ball.
- No-Run Zones:
 - 5 yards before midfield
 - 5 yards before the goal line
- If an offensive penalty moves the ball outside a No-Run Zone, the offense remains prohibited from running on the next play. After one play, normal run rules resume.

Blocking & Contact

- No blocking is allowed at any time.
- The center must immediately release into a route.
- Offensive players may not:
 - Initiate contact
 - Impede, screen, chip, or redirect defenders
- Any offensive contact or impediment is a penalty.

Bunch Formation

- If the offense is aligned in a bunched or stacked formation, and contact occurs:
 - The rusher must go around the bunch
 - The offense may not adjust or shift to interfere with the rusher's path



Rushing the Quarterback

- Defense may choose to rush or drop coverage.
- If defense chooses to rush:
 - Rusher must align 7 yards off the line of scrimmage
- If the defense chooses not to rush:
 - The quarterback has 7 seconds to throw (official counts aloud)
- 7-second throw clock is immediately dead upon:
 - A handoff
 - A backward lateral
- If the ball is handed off or lateraled, any defensive player can rush immediately (no rush line).

Dead Ball Rules

The play is dead when:

- The ball touches the ground (including bad snaps and fumbles)
- The ball carrier's knee touches the ground
- The ball carrier goes out of bounds
- The ball carrier's flag is removed

Scoring

- Touchdown = 6 points
- Safety = 2 points (next possession begins at own 5-yard line)

Extra Points:

- 5-yard line = 1 point
- 12-yard line = 2 points (run or pass)
- 18-yard line = 3 points (run or pass)
- Defensive return on conversion = 2 points

Playoffs

- Pool Tiebreakers (if applicable) 1) Head-to-head, 2) Point differential (cap +21/game), 3) Points allowed, 4) Coin toss.
- The league reserves the right to separate into A/B/C divisions for playoffs depending on number of teams and comp level.



Overtime

- Overtime is playoffs only. Ties can happen in pool play****
- A coin toss will be held to start overtime.
- The winner may choose to begin on offense or defense.

First Overtime Round

- Each team receives one play.
- The offensive team must choose before the snap:
 - 1 point from the 5-yard line, or
 - 2 points from the 12-yard line
- If the first team scores, the opposing team may:
 - Attempt the same point value to tie, or
 - Attempt the higher point value to win (if applicable)
- If the first team fails to score, the opposing team may win with any successful attempt.

Second and Subsequent Overtime Rounds

- All teams must attempt a 2-point conversion from the 12-yard line.
- The team that started the previous round on defense will begin the next round on offense.
- If one team scores and the other does not, the game ends.

Additional Rules

- Defensive returns ARE ALLOWED in OT. If returned to the endzone, the team is awarded 2 points, regardless of attempt try. A successful return ends OT (barring no penalties)

Penalties

- Unsportsmanlike Conduct – 15 yards
- Excessive Contact / Rough Play – 10 yards + LOD / AFD
- Defensive Pass Interference – Spot foul + AFD
- Offensive Pass Interference – 10 yards + replay down
- Flag Guarding / Stiff Arm – 5 yards from spot + loss of down
- Illegal Rush – 5 yards + replay down
- Illegal Motion – 5 yards + replay down
- Illegal Forward Pass – 5 yards + loss of down
- Delay of Game – 5 yards + replay down
- Illegal Flag Pull – 5 yards from end of play + AFD
- Last-Man Rule – Automatic touchdown (and 2 points on conversion returns)



MISC

- Uniform conflicts must be reported by the end of the first drive.
- Jewelry is discouraged; worn at player's own risk.
- No hard or unpadded casts; braces must be padded.
- If a player is found to have pockets mid game, that player will be pulled immediately and ineligible to return until they have no pockets.
- Towels or rags act as flags if pulled.
- A game cannot end on a defensive penalty; one untimed down will be played.
- **Fumble/Knock Out:** There are no "fumbles" in flag football. If a player is running with the ball (after gaining full control), and loses the ball through no cause of another player:
 - If the ball pops up and into the hands of another offensive player:
 - Behind the ball carrier - Considered a lateral
 - In front of the ball carrier - Considered an illegal forward pass and play is dead where original ball carrier lost the ball.
 - If the ball pops out and into the hands of a defensive player, it is considered a turnover and the defense can advance the ball.
 - If the ball pops out and hits the ground or goes out of bounds, the play is deemed down & dead where the player initially started to lose possession.
 - If the ball is knocked out by a defender, that is deemed an unsportsmanlike penalty. This can be assessed case by case based on what the ref sees and determines if the act was intentional or incidental.
- It is illegal for a player to lower their shoulder prior to contact. The first offense will incur a 15 yd unsportsmanlike penalty. Additional occurrences will result in further disciplinary action from penalties to ejection/suspension per referee discretion.
- Players intentionally breaking belts instead of pulling flags will be penalized a 15 yd unsportsmanlike penalty. Additional occurrences will result in further disciplinary action from penalties to ejection/suspension per referee discretion.

Authority Clause

The league reserves the right to interpret, clarify, or adjust rules in the interest of safety, fairness, and game flow. Officials' decisions are final.



Captain/Coach Responsibility & Official Communication

Captain Authority

- Each team must designate one captain (and may designate one alternate).
- Only team captains/coaches may communicate with referees regarding rule interpretations, penalties, or game administration.
- Non-captain players who approach or argue with officials may be penalized for unsportsmanlike conduct.

Captain/Coaches Responsibility

- Team captains/coaches are fully responsible for the behavior, conduct, and sportsmanship of all players on their roster and sideline.
- Captains/coaches are expected to:
 - Control their team's behavior
 - De-escalate conflicts
 - Ensure players comply with league rules and official directives

Disciplinary Accountability

- Any player misconduct—including but not limited to:
 - Verbal abuse
 - Threats toward officials, opponents, or staff
 - Repeated unsportsmanlike conduct
 - Physical intimidation or fighting
- —will be attributed not only to the individual player, but to the team captain/coach.
- **Disciplinary action may include:**
 - Player ejection or suspension
 - Team penalties or forfeiture
 - Captain suspension
 - Team suspension or removal from the event/tournament
 - Permanent bans for individuals or teams in severe cases

League Authority

- The league reserves the right to impose disciplinary action during a game or at any point during the tournament/event.
- Threats of violence or extreme misconduct may result in immediate suspension or permanent ban, without warning.
- Captains/coaches who repeatedly fail to control their team may be removed from leadership or barred from future league participation.

Officials' Protection

- Referees are not required to engage in debate or explanation with non-captain players.
- Officials' decisions are final and enforceable.
- Abuse of officials will not be tolerated.

