

# FLAG FOOTBALL

## GENERAL RULES

The Official Special Olympics Wisconsin Sports Rules shall govern all Special Olympics Wisconsin Flag Football competitions. As an international sports program, Special Olympics Wisconsin has developed these rules based upon Special Olympics International and Special Olympics North America's rules utilized during National and World level competitions for Flag Football. Website: [www.specialolympicswisconsin.org](http://www.specialolympicswisconsin.org)

### OFFICIAL EVENTS OFFERED

- 1) Team Competition
- 2) Unified Sports® Team Competition

### SECTION A – GENERAL RULES

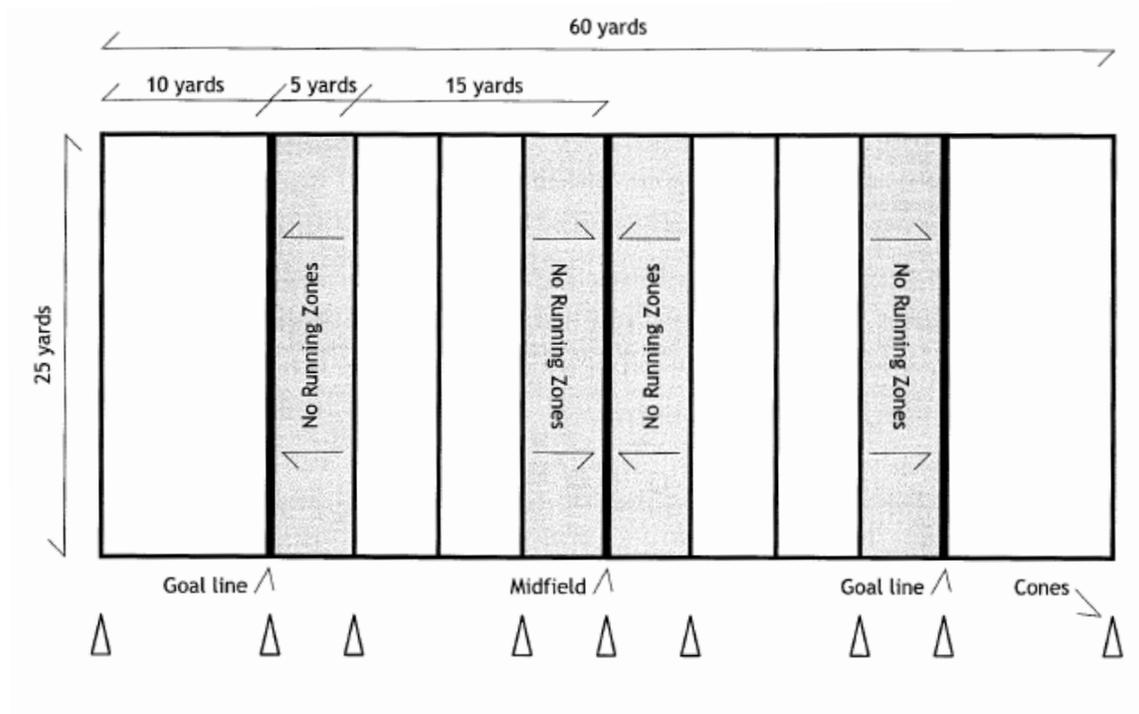
- 1) In cases not specifically covered by these rules, the SONA Flag Football rules will govern play.
- 2) Special Olympics Flag Football is a limited-contact sport. In all aspects of Special Olympics Flag Football, rulings shall be made with player safety as the primary consideration.
- 3) Protests will only be considered for rule infractions (not for referee judgments).
- 4) The games rules committee shall make all final judgments.
- 5) Teams must play a minimum of two (documented) games against other Special Olympics teams prior to registration for State competition. The team roster must remain the same for the two qualifying games and State competition. Teams that modify their rosters will forfeit all games. Qualifying games must be played against other teams with an Intent to Play form on file. **One game must be played against a team from another Agency.** Forfeited games do not count toward the scrimmage requirement.

### SECTION B – DIVISIONING

- 1) All teams will play in coed open divisions.

### SECTION C - FIELD

- 1) The playing field measures 60 yards long (including the end zones) and 25 yards wide. If insufficient space is available, a slightly smaller space can be used. A space of at least five yards around the field must be free and clear of obstructions. The field can be marked with paint of a visible color, and pylons/cones.
- 2) No-Run Zones are in place to prevent teams from conducting power run plays. While in the No-Run Zones, teams cannot run the ball in any fashion. All plays must be pass plays, even with a handoff.
- 3) Stepping on a boundary line is considered out of bounds.
- 4) Each Offensive team approaches only TWO No-Run Zones in each drive.
- 5) Diagram of Flag Football Field



## **SECTION D – EQUIPMENT**

- 1) An intermediate (youth) size football will be used in all divisions. Leather, synthetic leather, or rubber footballs are appropriate for use in training and competition. Nerf footballs may be used in training to assist athletes who are having difficulty catching the ball, but will not be used in competition.
- 2) A protective mouthpiece must be worn at all times.
- 3) 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.
- 4) A one-piece, three-flag belt will be worn during the game at all times.
  - a) Any player that **intentionally** wears their flag belt improperly (tied) while in play will be penalized.
  - b) Uniform shirts must be tucked in at the waist to avoid obstruction of Flag Pulling.
- 5) All players on a team must wear uniforms (shirt and pants) that are identical in color, trim, style and material. An Arabic number of contrasting color and at least four inches high on the front and six inches high on the back must be worn on all uniform shirts. All uniform shirts must be tucked in at the waist. All players' pants shall be either all long or all short in style and must not have pockets. If this must vary due to health or religious reasons, a Special Needs form must be completed upon registration. No cut-off shorts or denim jeans are allowed. Hats (baseball style caps or caps with hard visor) may not be worn. Receiver's gloves may be worn. No jewelry is allowed. Taped numbers on pinnies are not legal in SOWI competition. Proper uniforms and uniform numbering will be enforced. Players with illegal and/or non-matching uniforms will not be allowed to play. Legality of a uniform may be determined by the referee or by the event coordinator.

## **SECTION E – OFFICIALS AND THEIR DUTIES**

1. Officials will conduct the games in accordance to specified rules.
2. Officials shall have full authority to interpret rules and enforce any penalty he/she considers equitable, including the award of a score for an unfair act. For further questions, the tournament rules committee shall be consulted.
3. Officials shall have the power to make all decisions on any points not specifically covered in the rules.
4. In case of injury, equipment repair, or unsafe playing conditions, the official shall stop play but time does not stop for any reason unless the official considers it to be excessive. The decision to stop time is at the official's discretion. Time will be stopped for timeouts.
5. The official may call a game completed (for darkness or weather) at any time.
6. The official is also responsible for the following:
  - a. Having a presence at every play.
  - b. Indicating if a play is starting in a No-Run Zone.
  - c. Designating the Neutral Zone and Line of Scrimmage.
    - i. A special marker, placed by the official, will mark the beginning of the Neutral Zone (Rush Line).
    - ii. A special marker, placed by the official, will mark the Line of Scrimmage.
7. Following each team's score, the Official shall pull the flag belt off of the scoring athlete to verify that the flag belt was attached properly.

## **SECTION F – ROSTERS**

### **TRADITIONAL TEAMS**

- 1) Each team roster shall consist of a minimum number of five players with a maximum of 15 players. A team must have five players to start a game. Failure to start with five players will result in a forfeiture of the game(s). Teams must be ready to field a legal team within ten minutes of the declared start of the game or the game will be forfeited.
- 2) During play, due to injury or player disqualification, a team may play with as few as four players. However, if a team is unable to field at least four players, the game shall be forfeit. At no time can play continue with less than the minimum number of players.

### **UNIFIED TEAMS**

- 1) Each team roster shall consist of a minimum number of five players with a maximum of 15 players. A team must have five players to start a game. Failure to start with five players will result in a forfeiture of the game(s). Teams must be ready to field a legal team within ten minutes of the declared start of the game or the game will be forfeited.
- 2) The line-up on the field shall never exceed three athletes and two Unified Partners at any time.
- 3) During play, due to injury or player disqualification, a team may play with as few as four players (minus 1 athlete or partner). However, if a team is unable to field at least four players or maintain a proper ratio of athletes/partners, the game shall be forfeit. At no time can play continue with less than the minimum number of players.

## **SECTION G – THE GAME**

### **TIMING**

- 1) A regulation game shall consist of two 20-minute halves (running time), with a five minute halftime.
- 2) A stopped-clock format will be used during the last two minutes of each half of the game. The clock will stop on all dead ball whistles (i.e. incomplete pass, out of bounds, change of possession).
- 3) Officials can stop the clock at their discretion (injuries, delays).
- 4) 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.
- 5) Each team receives one 60-second time-out per half. An unused time-out in the first half does not carry over to the second half. The clock will stop for time outs.
- 6) All line-up cards must be presented to the official scorekeeper 10 minutes before the start of any game.

### **OVERTIME**

- 1) A coin toss is held to determine first possession.
- 2) Each team receives two plays starting from midfield and the team gaining the most points or gaining the most yardage if neither scores is awarded one extra point and wins the game.
- 3) Exceptions to this rule are as follows:
  - a) If the team with the first attempt in overtime scores on the first play, the opposing team must score on its first play also.
  - b) If both teams score a touchdown, or gain the same yardage, the procedure is repeated until one team wins.
  - c) Interception: The team that intercepts the pass automatically wins the game.

Reason: A loss of possession is the worst outcome a team can have. The intercepting team would only have to take a knee in order to have a better outcome with a yardage advantage. They will not be required to take the field.

### **SCORING**

- Touchdown: Six points
- Extra Point: One point from the five-yard line  
Two points from the 12-yard line
- Safety: Two points
- Mercy Rule: If a team is up by 25 or more points in the last two minutes of the game, the clock will continue to run.

### **POSSESSIONS**

- 1) The first possession shall be decided by a coin toss at the beginning of the game. 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.
- 2) All possessions, except following an interception, start at the offensive team's five-yard line.
- 3) The offense has four plays to cross mid-field.

- 4) Once the offense crosses mid-field, they have four additional plays to score a touchdown.
- 5) If the offensive team fails to cross mid-field or score a touchdown in the designated number of plays, possession of the ball changes and the opposite team starts at their 5-yard line.
- 6) Interceptions change possession of the ball at the spot of the interception. A ball intercepted in the end zone is spotted at the five-yard line.
- 7) Each time the ball is spotted (marked ready for play by the official) the team has 30 seconds to snap the ball.
- 8) The ball is marked at the spot where the position of the ball is when the player is declared down (carrier's flag belt is removed or hand/knee touches ground).

### **LIVE BALL/DEAD BALL**

- 1) Positions/Snap
  - a) The ball must be snapped between the Center's legs to start each play.
  - b) No minimum number of defensive players is required to line up on the line of scrimmage.
- 2) Dead Ball/Fumbles
  - a) There are no fumbles. The ball is called "dead" and spotted where it hits the ground. If the ball is fumbled forward, it will be spotted where the ball carrier's feet were at the time of the fumble. If the ball falls backward, it is marked where it hits the ground. The team with possession of the ball retains possession on all fumbles.
  - b) Play is ruled dead when:
    - The ball carrier's flag is pulled
    - The ball carrier loses his/her flag belt
    - The ball carrier steps out of bounds
    - The ball carrier's knee or hand touches the ground
    - A touchdown, extra point, or safety is scored
    - When the defense obtains possession of the ball
    - When a forward pass strikes the ground or is caught simultaneously by opposing players (the offense retains possession)
    - A pass is intercepted (no returns)
    - A receiver catches a ball without his/her flags attached
    - A snapped ball touches the ground
    - Any inadvertent whistle
- 3) 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 chose to replay the down.
- 4) 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 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, or
    - iv) Deliberately advancing the ball after it has been declared dead.
- 5) False Start
  - a) No member of the offensive team may simulate the start of the play before the ball is snapped.

### **RUSHING THE PASSER (Quarterback)**

- 1) All players that rush the quarterback when the ball is snapped must be a minimum of seven yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.
  - a) A special marker, placed by the official, will designate the spot (Rush Line) seven yards from the line of scrimmage.
- 2) Players not rushing the quarterback may defend the line of scrimmage.
- 3) Once the quarterback hands off the ball, the Rush Line no longer exists, and all defenders are eligible to rush.

### **RUNNING**

- 1) Handling the Ball by the offense.
  - a) Handling the ball is transferring player possession from one teammate to another without throwing or kicking it.
  - b) Only direct handoffs behind the line of scrimmage are permitted. Handoffs may be in front, behind, or to the side of the quarterback/offensive player, but must be behind the line of scrimmage.
  - c) In Unified Sports divisions, a partner may hand off to another partner behind the line of scrimmage.
  - d) The offense may use multiple handoffs behind the line of scrimmage.
  - e) "Center Sneak" – 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 the direct handoff from the quarterback/offensive player before advancing the ball.
- 2) Running
  - a) The Quarterback (player receiving the snap) cannot advance the ball across the line of scrimmage.
  - b) The player who takes a hand-off can pass the ball, as long as he/she does not pass the line of scrimmage.
  - c) Any ball snapped from the offensive No-Run Zone must be passed. The purpose is to avoid short yardage power running situations. Exception to this rule is made for the following instance: Once the Offense crosses the mid-field line, the mid-field No-Run Zone is no longer enforced (such as when an Offensive foul moves the ball back beyond the mid-field line).
  - d) The ball carrier may not dive, hurdle or commit acts of flag guarding to shield a defender from grasping his/her flag.
  - e) The ball is marked at the spot where the position of the ball is when the player is declared down (carrier's flag belt is removed or hand/knee touches ground).
- 3) 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.
- 4) Flag Guarding (Shielding):
  - a) Runners shall not shield (flag guard) by using their hands, arms, or the ball to deny the opportunity for an opponent to pull or remove their flag belt.

- b) This includes:
  - i) Swinging the hand or arm over the flag belt
  - ii) Placing the ball in possession over the flag belt
  - iii) Lowering the elbow or head
  - iv) Lowering the shoulders or arm over the flag belt
  - v) Stiff arming the defense
  - vi) Spinning

### **PASSING AND RECEIVING**

- 1) Passing and Receiving by the offense.
  - a) All passes must be forward and received beyond the line of scrimmage.
  - b) Shovel passes are allowed, but must be received beyond the line of scrimmage.
  - c) All players are eligible to receive a pass, including the quarterback if he/she has legally handed the ball off.
    - i) Exception: In Unified Sports divisions, a partner may **not** pass to another partner.
  - d) Only one player is allowed in motion at the snap and he/she may not be moving toward the line of scrimmage at the snap.
  - e) A player must have at least one foot in bounds when making a catch.
  - f) Interceptions change possession of the ball at the point of the interception. However, a ball intercepted in the end zone is spotted at the five-yard line.
- 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.
    - i) Exception: In Unified Sports divisions, a partner is ineligible to receive a pass from another partner.
      - (1) Unified Sports Teams are expected to comply with this rule without intervention by officials. Failure to “self-patrol” will be considered unsportsmanlike and will be penalized accordingly.

### **SCREEN BLOCKING**

- 1) Legally obstructing an opponent without contacting him/her with any part of the screen blocker’s body.
- 2) 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. He/she may also cross the arms across the chest.

- 3) Any use of arms, elbows, or legs to initiate contact during the screen block is illegal.
- 4) A player must be on his/her feet before, during and after screen blocking.
- 5) Screen blocking is the only form of legal blocking that can be used by any player at any time.
- 6) There are two forms of legal blocking:
  - a) **Backfield Blocking:** 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 step if opponent has his/her back to blocker.
    - 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 cannot avoid contact by stopping or changing directions.
    - iv) Immediately after the snap of the ball, a blocker may move laterally or backward two steps.
  - b) **Downfield Blocking:** A basketball style (non-moving) screen is the only acceptable form of downfield blocking. The blocker also may not run between a rusher and ball carrier impeding a defender's progress to the flag.

### **FLAG PULLING**

- 1) A legal flag pull takes place when the ball carrier is in full possession of the ball.
- 2) It is illegal to pull or strip the ball from the carrier's possession at any time (penalty).
- 3) If a player's flag belt inadvertently falls off during the play, the player is down immediately upon possession of the ball and the play ends.
- 4) A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off of a player who is not in possession of the ball (penalty).
- 5) Flag Guarding/Shielding is an attempt by the ball carrier to obstruct the defense's access to the flags by stiff arming, dropping the head or shoulder, or intentionally covering the flags with the football jersey.

### **FORMATIONS**

- 1) Line of Scrimmage
  - a) A vertical plane through the point of the ball nearest the defensive 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.
- 2) 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 second.
- 3) Shift

- a) The action of one 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 second prior to the snap.
- 4) Snap
- a) The legal act of passing the ball through the Center's legs from the ground to the Quarterback to start a play. Play starts at the initial movement of the ball.

### **UNIFIED TEAM PLAY**

- 1) During competition, a team shall field five (5) players to start the game (required). The line-up shall never exceed three (3) athletes and two (2) partners at any time. Teams may continue with a minimum of four (4) players (minus 1 partner or athlete) due to disqualification or injury. Failure to adhere to the required ratio results in a forfeit.
- 2) Each team is to have a non-playing coach.
- 3) Partners may not pass to another partner. Unified Sports Teams are expected to comply with this rule without intervention by officials. Failure to "self-patrol" will be considered unsportsmanlike and will be penalized accordingly.
- 4) Partners may hand off to another partner behind the line of scrimmage.
- 5) Partners shall not dominate play.

### **PENALTIES**

- 1) 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 and repeatedly committing fouls which halve the distance to the goal line.
- 2) All penalties are assessed from the line of scrimmage.
- 3) No penalty may take the ball more than half the distance to the offender's goal line.
- 4) All penalties are automatically accepted (no option to decline). Exception to this rule is made in the case where the acceptance of the penalty would result in the change of possession, score, or cause an advantage to the offending team. While a penalty is accepted, the yardage can be declined if it could possibly force a team into a no run zone against their wishes.
- 5) Offense: 10 yards from the line of scrimmage and loss of down
  - a) Illegal motion (more than one player moving at snap, moving forward at snap)
  - b) Offside (in neutral zone at snap, false start)
  - c) Illegal forward/backward pass (pass not completed beyond line of scrimmage; illegal backward pass; QB pass beyond line of scrimmage)
  - d) Illegal Procedure (quarterback run)
  - e) Pass Interference (picking or pushing defender)
  - f) Illegal contact (holding, blocking, bumping, stiff arming)
  - g) Flag Guarding
  - h) Delay of Game (failing to snap within 30 seconds of ball placement)
  - i) Diving to advance the ball or gain an advantage

- j) Running the ball in No-Run Zones
- k) Too many players on the field
- 6) Defense: 10 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
  - a) Offside (in or beyond neutral zone at snap)
  - b) Pass Interference (any contact with the intended receiver while the pass is in the air)
  - c) Illegal contact (holding, blocking, bumping; stripping)
  - d) Illegal flag pull (before receiver has ball)
  - e) Illegal rushing (rushing Quarterback inside seven-yard line)
  - f) Too many players on the field
  - g) Exceptions to this penalty:
    - i) In the case where there is a Defensive foul and an unsuccessful extra point attempt in the same play, the unsuccessful attempt is negated and the offensive team is given the option to start the play over at either:
      - (1) Half the distance to the goal
      - (2) The original Line of Scrimmage
    - ii) In the case where there is a Defensive foul and a successful extra point attempt, the Official shall decline (or wave off) the penalty and all eligible points are awarded.

**All penalties will be called and enforced at the discretion of the officials on the field and can not be protested.**

### **UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT**

- 1) Sportsmanship/Roughing
  - a) The officials may disqualify, at their discretion, any player who participates in rough or unsportsmanlike play.
  - b) During player possession, it is illegal for a defensive player to strip or pull the ball from the ball carrier at any time.
- 2) Ball carriers MUST make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position.
- 3) Defenders are not allowed to run through the ball carrier when pulling flags.
- 4) Partners may not pass to another partner. Unified Sports Teams are expected to comply with this rule without intervention by officials. Failure to “self-patrol” will be considered unsportsmanlike and will be penalized accordingly.

**The Flag Football Individual Skills Assessment has been moved to the Appendix  
Section of the Competition Guide**