



Flag Football

The Official Special Olympics Sports Rules shall govern all Special Olympics flag football competitions. Special Olympics has created these rules based upon the National Football League's Air it Out flag football rules which will be the National Governing Body (NGB). The National Football League's Air it Out flag football rules shall be employed in local competitions except when either is in conflict with the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules. In such cases, the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules shall apply.

A. Events offered by Special Olympics Missouri

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

B. Uniform Specifications

- 1) All participants must have a playing uniform consisting of matching shirts with numbers on front and back which can be tucked in at the waist.
- 2) No jewelry may be worn (rings, bracelets, necklaces, earrings, etc.).
- 3) All players must wear athletic shorts/pants without pockets. No blue jeans will be allowed.
- 4) Players must wear rubber-cleated or flat-soled athletic shoes. Metal cleats, spikes, hiking boots or other equipment deemed dangerous by officials will not be allowed.

C. Equipment

- 1) An intermediate (youth) size football will be used in all divisions.
- 2) A protective mouthpiece must be worn at all times.
- 3) A one piece three flag belt will be worn during the game.

D. Points of Emphasis

- 1) No team shall repeatedly commit fouls which halve the distance to the goal line.
- 2) 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.
- 3) The referee will enforce any penalty he/she considers equitable, including the award of a score for an unfair act.

E. General Rules

- 1) Special Olympics Flag Football is non-contact. In all aspects of Special Olympics Flag Football, rulings shall be made with player safety as the primary consideration.
- 2) The team roster may contain a maximum of 10 players.
- 3) Teams shall field 5 players to start the game (required). Teams may continue with a minimum of 4 players, if necessary due to disqualification or injury.
- 4) Teams will be grouped in divisions based on a classification round of games.

F. Scoring

- 1) Touchdown: 6 points
- 2) Extra Point: 1 point (from the 6 yard line), 2 points (from the 12 yard line)
- 3) Safety: 2 points

G. Timing

- 1) The game shall consist of two 20-minute halves (running time).
- 2) Officials can stop the clock at their discretion (injuries, delays).
- 3) 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.
- 4) There shall be a 5-minute break at halftime.

H. Coin Toss

- 1) A coin toss determines first possession.
- 2) Each team will provide two captains.
- 3) The officials and team captains will meet 3 minutes prior to the start of the contest to conduct the coin toss.
- 4) 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.

I. Possessions

- 1) All possessions, except following an interception, start at the offensive team's 5-yard line.
- 2) The offense has 4 plays to cross mid-field.
- 3) Once the offense crosses mid-field, they have 4 additional plays to score a touchdown.
- 4) If the offensive team fails to cross mid-field or score a touchdown in the prescribed number of plays, possession of the ball changes and the opposite team starts at their 5-yard line.
- 5) Interceptions change possession of the ball at the spot of the interception. A ball intercepted in the end zone is spotted at the 5 yard line.
- 6) Each time the ball is spotted (marked ready for play by the official) the team has 30 seconds to snap the ball.

J. Positions / Snap

- 1) The ball must be snapped between the legs to start each play.
- 2) No minimum number of players is required to line up on the line of scrimmage.

K. Rushing the QB

- 1) All players that rush the quarterback must be a minimum of 7 yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped. A special marker, placed by the official, will designate the spot 7 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 5-yard zone no longer exists, and all defenders are eligible to rush.

L. Running

- 1) The Quarterback (player receiving the snap) CANNOT run the ball.
- 2) Only direct hand-offs behind the line of scrimmage are legal. Laterals or pitches of any kind are not allowed.
- 3) The player who takes a hand-off can pass the ball, as long as he/she does not pass the line of scrimmage.
- 4) "No Running Zones" are located 5 yards before the mid-field line and goal line. Any ball snapped from these zones must be passed. The purpose of "No Running Zones" is to avoid short yardage power running situations.
- 5) The ball carrier may not dive, hurdle or use either arm to shield a defender from grasping his/her flag.
- 6) The ball is spotted where the ball carrier's belt is when the flag is pulled.

M. Passing and Receiving

- 1) All passes must be forward and received beyond the line of scrimmage.
- 2) All players are eligible to receive a forward pass, including the quarterback if he/she has legally handed-off. Exception: In Unified Sports® divisions, if a Partner throws a pass, only Athletes are eligible receivers.
- 3) 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.
- 4) A player must have at least one foot in bounds when making a catch.
- 5) Interceptions change possession of the ball at the point of the interception. (Exception: A ball intercepted in the end zone is spotted at the 5-yard line).

N. Dead Balls / Fumbles

- 1) There are no fumbles. The ball is spotted where it hits the ground.
- 2) Play is ruled dead when:
 - a. the ball carrier's flag is pulled
 - b. the ball carrier loses his/her flag
 - c. the ball carrier steps out of bounds
 - d. the ball carrier's knee or hand touches the ground
 - e. a touchdown, extra point, or safety is scored
 - f. when during a try-for-point the defense obtains possession of the ball
 - g. when a forward pass strikes the ground or is caught simultaneously by opposing players (the offensive retains possession)
 - h. a pass is intercepted (no returns)
 - i. a receiver catches a ball without his/her flags attached
 - j. a snapped ball touches the ground

k. when there is an inadvertent whistle

O. Penalties

- 1) All penalties are assessed from the line of scrimmage.
- 2) No penalty may take the ball more than half the distance to the offender's goal line.
- 3) All penalties are automatically accepted. (no declination)
- 4) Sportsmanship / Roughing: The officials will disqualify any player who participates in rough or unsportsmanlike play. No warning is required.
- 5) Offense: 10 yards from the line of scrimmage and loss of down
 - a. Illegal motion (more than 1 player moving at snap, moving forward at snap)
 - b. Offside (in neutral zone at snap, false start)
 - c. Illegal forward pass (not beyond line of scrimmage; Partner to Partner)
 - d. Pass Interference (picking or pushing defender)
 - e. Illegal Contact (holding, blocking, bumping)
 - f. Flag Guarding (driving, warding off)
 - g. Delay of Game (failing to snap within 30 seconds of ready)
- 6) Defense: 10 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
 - a. Offside (in or beyond neutral zone at snap)
 - b. Pass Interference
 - c. Illegal Contact (holding, blocking, bumping)
 - d. Illegal Flag Pull (before receiver has ball)
 - e. Illegal Rushing (rushing quarterback inside 5 yard limit)

P. Overtime: If the score is tied at the end of regulation play

- 1) A coin toss is held to determine first possession.
- 2) Each team receives one play from its own 5-yard line.
- 3) The team gaining the most yards is awarded 1 extra point and wins the game. If both teams score a touchdown, or gain the same yardage, the procedure is repeated until one team wins.

Q. Unified Sports® Teams

- 1) The roster shall contain a proportionate number of Athletes and Partners.
- 2) During competition, the line-up shall never exceed 3 Athletes and 2 Partners at any time. Failure to adhere to the required ratio results in a forfeit.
- 3) Each team shall have an adult non-playing coach responsible for the line-up and conduct of the team during competition.

R. Supplement to the Rules

- 1) Delay of the Game: 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 the game. This includes:
 - a. Interrupting the 30-second count for any reason except for a granted time-out.
 - b. Consuming more than 30 seconds to snap the ball after it is ready for play.
 - c. Failing to remove an injured player for whose benefit an excess time-out has been granted.

- d. Deliberately advancing the ball after it has been declared dead.
- 2) Diving: a defensive or offensive player may dive to catch a pass, however, diving is illegal when used to down a player or advance a ball. A player cannot dive in an attempt to gain extra yardage. The team will be penalized accordingly.
 - 3) Eligible Receiver: All offensive players are eligible to receive a pass, except in Unified Sports® divisions where Partners are ineligible when Partners are throwing the pass. 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) False Start: No member of the offensive team may simulate the start of the play before the ball is snapped.
 - 5) Handing the Ball: Handing the ball is transferring player possession from one teammate to another without throwing or kicking it. A ball carrier may hand the ball backward at any time. No forward hand-offs are allowed. (Illegal pass)
 - 6) Hurdling: 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. (Note: Jumping over a player who is on the ground to avoid injury, by official’s judgment, is legal.)
 - 7) Inadvertent Whistle: 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 choose to re-play the down.
 - 8) Line of Scrimmage: The line of scrimmage for each team is a vertical plane through the point of the ball nearest the team’s goal line. Each player on a team must be on its side of the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.
 - 9) Motion: Only one player of the offensive team may be in motion at the snap. This player must be behind the quarterback and not moving toward its goal line at the time the ball is snapped. If the player comes to a stop he/she must be set for one second.
 - 10) Screen Blocking: Legally obstructing an opponent without contacting him/her with any part of the screen blocker’s body. 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. Any use of arms, elbows, or legs to initiate contact during the screen block is illegal. A player must be on his/her feet before, during and after screen blocking. Screen blocking is the only form of legal blocking that can be used by any player at any time.
 - a. The screen blocker must give an opponent at least one step if opponent has his/her back to blocker.
 - b. The screen blocker must not initiate contact with opponent.
 - c. 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.
 - d. After a screen blocker has taken his/her legal screening position, the blocker may move laterally or backward to maintain the block.Note: If any of the above provisions are violated, and contact results, the screener has committed an illegal block.

- 11) Shielding (Flag Guarding): Runners shall not flag guard by using their hands, arms, or the ball to deny the opportunity for opponent to pull or remove their flag belt. This includes:
 - a. Swinging the hand or arm over the flag belt
 - b. Placing the ball in possession over the flag belt
 - c. Lowering the shoulders or arm over the flag belt
- 12) Shift: A shift is the action of one or more offensive players who after taking set positions move to a new position prior to the snap. A player who shifts must reset for one second prior to the snap.
- 13) Snap: A snap is the legal act of passing the ball through the legs from the ground to the quarterback to start a play.
- 14) Substitution: Any player on the roster may enter upon the completion of a play (when the ball is dead). Each substitute must play at least one down prior to being replaced. A replaced player must leave the field immediately.