Flag Football Rules

NIRSA National Collegiate Flag Football Rules shall govern play with the following clarifications and exceptions.

A participant may play for only 1 team. They may play on 2 teams if one of the teams is a Co-Rec team.

Intramural Sports Office: 912-344-2712

General Rules

Official Team: Male/Female team = Seven (7) players
Co-Rec team = Eight (8) players
Minimum = Five (5) players
Minimum = Six (6) players

Minimum number must be present to start the game and avoid a forfeit.

Game time is forfeit time!

ID: Participants must bring their valid ID with them to the fields.

NO ID, NO PLAY!

Score Card: All players must sign the scorecard before play. No exceptions. Once you have been recorded on a teams scorecard you are on that team for the remainder of the season, including playoffs.

Game Supervision: The intramural staff will assign officials for each scheduled game. All flag football games conducted by the Department of Campus Recreation must be played under the supervision of the field supervisor employed by the Division. No game may be played without its being scheduled through the Intramural Office. An intramural official will keep the scorecard.

Equipment

Shoes: Each player must wear athletic shoes. They must be made of soft, pliable upper material (molded plastic, canvas, leather, or synthetic) which covers the foot attached to a composition bottom. Shoes with rubber cleats are acceptable; however, rubber cleats with metal tips AND all-metal tip screw-in cleats are not permitted.

Jerseys: For all flag football games, it is required that teams wear uniformly colored jerseys in order to help distinguish one team from another. Jerseys may be checked out from the intramural sports staff at the field. During the game, jerseys must be tucked in at all times and/or the entire flag belt must be visible by players and officials.

Illegal equipment:
- Pants or shorts must be free of pockets, drawstrings, and exposed belt loops.
- All jewelry must be removed before playing. (This includes earrings, necklaces, watches, and rings)
- Sweatshirts must also not have pockets exposed and hoods must be tucked inside the shirt.
- Stocking hats may be worn but any hat with a hard bill may not be.
- Helmets, casts, shoulder pads, and boots are all examples of illegal equipment.

Any equipment that in the intramural staff’s judgment would be injurious to participants is illegal to wear.

Flags: The intramural sports staff will furnish flag belts for all contests. All flag belts worn by a team should be the same color. Competing teams should wear different colored flags.
Ball: Men will use a regulation football. Women and Co-Rec may use a regulation, intermediate, or youth ball. Each team may provide a ball or the teams may agree upon one ball to play the game with. Balls may be checked out from the intramural sports staff at the field. Teams may check out a practice ball from the equipment center.

The Playing Field

Game Regulations

Game Time: A game shall consist of two 20-minute halves, with a 5-minute half-time intermission.

Timing: Regular playing time will be kept on an automatic timing device. The clock will be kept running throughout the first half and the first 18 minutes of the second half and will not stop for dead balls.

Two Minute Warning: There will be a "two-minute warning" in the second half of play. The NIRSA "Mercy Rule" will be in effect. If a team is 19 or more points ahead in men's or women's, 25 for Co-Rec, when the referee announces the 2 minute warning for the second half or any time after, the game shall be over. If the game is not ended by the mercy rule, the clock will stop on all dead ball situations the final two minutes.

Start of Game: The game shall start with a coin toss, or odds game. The referee shall toss a coin in the presence of the opposing team captains, after first designating which captain shall call the fall of the coin. The captain winning the toss shall choose one of the following: (1) take option in the first half (2) take option in the second half. The options available to teams each half are (1) offense (2) defend a goal. The team not choosing the option in the first half will choose the option at the start of the second half.

Starting Play: To start each half, following a touchdown, or touchback, the ball will be placed on the 14-yard line of the team in possession. There will be no kickoffs.

Time Outs: Each team will be allowed three time-outs per game. If the game goes into overtime, each team will receive one (1) time-out per overtime period. The referee may declare a time-out for any injury or rule interpretation between officials.

Tie Game. If the score is tied at the end of regulation, each team will get a series of downs to try to score from the 10 yard line.
**Scoring:** Touchdown - 6 points  
Safety - 2 points  
PAT (run or pass) –  
  1. 3 points from the 20  
  2. 2 points from the 10  
  3. 1 point from the 3  

**Basic Rules**

**Zone Lines:** The field is divided into four 20-yard zones. A team will have a series of downs to advance the ball to the next zone.

**Series of Downs:** A team shall have four (4) consecutive downs to advance the ball into the next zone. This may be affected by penalty.

**Scrimmage Line:** The scrimmage line for the offensive team is the yard line and its vertical plane which passes through the forward point of the ball which is placed at the orange ball spotter. The scrimmage line for the defensive team is the vertical plane which passes one yard from the point of the ball nearest its own goal line.

**Ball Responsibility:** The offensive team is responsible for retrieving the ball after the down.

**Stance:** Players may use a 2, 3, or 4 point stance.

**Minimum Line Players:** The offensive team must have at least 4 players (Co-Rec requires 5) on their scrimmage line at the snap. All remaining players must be on or behind the scrimmage line.

**Motion:** One offensive player may be in motion, but not in motion toward the opponent’s goal line at the snap. This man is not considered one of the four men needed on the line of scrimmage.

**Snapping the Ball:** Each time the ball is snapped it must be a quick and continuous motion of the hand(s). The ball must leave the hand(s) in this motion. The player who receives the snap must be at least two (2) yards behind the offensive scrimmage line. The quarterback may not take a snap directly under center.

**Ball in Play:** On each play after the referee sounds the ready for play whistle, the team on offense has 25 seconds to put the ball in play.

**Mercy Rule:**  
A. If a team is 19 or more points ahead when the 2 minute warning is announced in the 2nd half, the game shall be over.  
B. If a team scores in the last 2 minutes of the 2nd half and that score creates a point differential of 19 or more points, the game shall be over.

**Handing and Passing the Ball**

**Handing the Ball Backwards:** Any player may hand the ball backwards at any time at any location on the field.

**Backward Pass:** A runner may pass the ball backward or lose player possession by a fumble anytime except if intentionally thrown out-of-bounds to conserve time.

**Backward Pass Out-of-Bounds:** A backward pass or fumble which goes out-of-bounds between the goal lines belongs to the team last in possession at the out-of-bounds spot. If out-of-bounds behind the goal line, it is a touchback or a safety.

**Dead Ball:** A backward pass or fumble which touches the ground between the goal lines is dead at the spot where it touches the ground and belong to the team last in possession unless lost on downs.

**Eligible Receivers:** All players are eligible to touch or catch a pass.

**Legal Forward Pass:** During a scrimmage down a forward pass may be thrown providing the passer’s feet are behind the offensive scrimmage line when the ball leaves the passer’s hand.
Illegal Forward Pass: A forward pass is illegal if:
1. The passer’s foot is beyond the scrimmage line when the ball leaves his/her hand.
2. Thrown after team possession has changed during a down.
3. Intentionally thrown to the ground or out-of-bounds to save loss of yardage. (EXCEPTION=A Spike to stop clock)
4. A passer catches his/her untouched forward or backward pass.
5. There is more than one forward pass per down.

Legal Catch or Interception: A forward pass is considered a catch as long as the first part of the person to make contact with the ground after the catch touches inbound. One foot must touch inbound to be considered a catch.

Simultaneous Catch by Opposing Players: If a forward pass is caught simultaneously by members of opposing teams, the ball becomes dead and belongs to the team that snapped the ball at the spot of the catch.

Incomplete Pass: When a forward pass touches the ground or anything out-of-bounds, it becomes dead.

Blocking

Blocking. All players will be limited to screen blocking. Screen blocking is legally obstructing an opponent without contacting him with any part of the screen blocker's body.

Offensive Screen Blocking. The offensive screen block shall take place without contact. The screen blocker shall have his/her hands and arms at his/her side or behind his/her back. Any use of the arms, elbows, or legs to initiate contact during an offensive player's screen block is illegal. A blocker may use his/her hand or arm to break a fall or to retain his/her balance.

Screen Blocking Fundamentals. A player who screens shall not:
1. When he/she is behind a stationary opponent, take position closer than a normal step from him or her.
2. When he/she assumes a position at the side or in front a stationary opponent, make contact with him/her.
3. Take a position so close to a moving opponent that his/her opponent cannot avoid contact by stopping or direction. The speed of the player to be screened determines where the screener may take his/her position. This position will vary and may be 1 normal steps or strides from the opponent.
4. After assuming his/her legal screening position move maintain it, unless he/she moves in the same direction and path of his/her opponent. If the screener violates these provisions and contact results, he/she has committed a personal foul.

Blocking and Interlocked Interference: Teammates of a runner or passer may interfere for him/her by screen blocking, but shall not use interlocked interference by grasping or encircling one another in any manner.

Use of Hands or Arms by the Defense. Defensive players must go around the offensive player's screen block. The arms and hands may not be used as a wedge to contact the opponent. The application of this rule depends entirely on the judgement of the official. A blocker may use his/her arms or hands to break a fall or retain his/her balance.

Flag Belt Removal

Basics: When the flag belt is clearly taken from the runner the down shall end and the ball is declared dead. A player who removes the flag belt from the runner should immediately hold the flag belt above his/her head to assist the official.

Inadvertent Removal: If a flag belt inadvertently falls to the ground, a one hand tag between the shoulders and knees constitutes down.

Diving: A player, who is attempting to remove the flag belt, may leave his/her feet. Any contact will be considered the fault of the person diving.

Defensive Contact: In an attempt to remove the flag belt from a runner, defensive players may contact the body and shoulders of an opponent with their hands, but not their face or any part of their neck or head. A defensive player may not hold, push, or knock the runner down in an attempt to remove the flag belt.
**Runner**

**Flag Guarding**: Runners shall not guard the flag by using their hands, arms, or the ball to deny the opponent an opportunity to remove the flag belt. Examples include but are not limited to:
1. Placing or swinging the hand or arm over the flag belt.
2. Placing the ball in possession over the flag belt.
3. Lowering the shoulders in such a manner that places the arm over the flag belt.

**Stiff-Arm**: The runner shall be prohibited from contacting an opponent with extended arm or hand.

**Obstructing the Runner**: The defensive player shall not hold, grasp, or obstruct the forward progress of a runner when in the act of removing the flag belt.

**Charging**: A runner shall not charge into an opponent in his/her path. The runner must avoid contact by changing direction if the defender has established his or her position. If the defender has not established his or her position and that creates contact, the defender will be penalized for illegal contact.

**Hurdling**: A ball carrier may not hurdle another player unless that player is lying flat on the ground. Penalty: 10 yards from spot of foul.

**Knee Touching Ground**: The ball becomes dead if any part of the ball carrier, other than the hands or feet, touches the ground.

**Kicking**

**Protected Scrimmage Kick**: The only kick permitted shall be a punt. For each scrimmage kick, offensive team must maintain four players on the line of scrimmage until the ball is kicked. No one shall rush the kicker and no player from either team shall cross the scrimmage line until the ball is kicked.

**Declaration on 4th down**: Before the 4th down play, the offensive captain must declare to the referee whether they intend to punt or attempt to achieve the zone line-to-gain. After the decision has been made, the referee will announce it to the defense, and the choice cannot be changed unless there is a timeout taken or penalty occurs before the snap.

**Quick Kick**: Quick kicks are illegal

**Punting After the Snap**: After receiving the snap, the kicker must punt the ball immediately and in a continuous motion.

**Ball hitting the Ground**: When receiving a kick a team may choose to let the ball hit the ground before they pick it up and run; however if they “muff” the punt (try to catch the ball and drop it) the ball is down where it hits the ground.

**Behind the Goal Line**: The receiving team may receive the protected scrimmage kick behind the goal line and either down the ball for a touchback or run the ball out of the end zone. If the ball goes out of the end zone, it is ruled as a touchback. NO Fair Catches.

**Penalty Enforcement**

**Captain’s Choice**: When a foul occurs, the Referee shall give the preliminary signal. The Referee shall inform the captain of the offended team regarding their options on the penalty. Once a penalty has been accepted or declined, that choice may not be changed.

**Establishing the Zone Line-to-gain**: The zone line-to-gain shall be established after all penalties are administered and prior to the ready for play signal.

**Half the Distance**: A measurement cannot take the ball more than half the distance from the enforcement spot to the offending teams goal line. If the penalty is greater than this, the ball is placed halfway between the enforcement spot and the goal line.
**Loss of down Fouls:** Fouls by the offense that result in a loss of down include:
1. Illegal backward pass
2. Illegal forward pass
3. Offensive pass interference
4. Insecure flag belt

**Automatic First down Fouls:** Fouls by the defense that result in an automatic first down include:
1. Defensive pass interference
2. Roughing the passer
3. Insecure flag belt

**Encroachment (Defensive offsides):** 2nd defensive encroachment on the same down results in a 10 yd penalty.

**Additional Policies**

**Inclement Weather:** During league and or play-off games, a game “under play” may be called due to inclement weather or mechanical failure of the lights. Situations that would warrant calling games due to inclement weather would be lightning and thunder, tornado warnings and conditions that would be deemed injurious to participants continued play. The Intramural Supervisor will have the responsibility for calling games due to inclement weather or light failure. Games that are called prior to starting by the supervisor will be re-scheduled (if time permits) by the Intramural Staff. These games will be re-scheduled by the Intramural Staff the next regular office day and notices of the re-scheduled games will be posted.

For additional information on protests, rescheduling, eligibility and more, please review the Intramural Sports Handbook.

**Co-Rec Additions to the Flag Football Rules**

1. The number of players will be 8 (4 males and 4 females). If a team has 7 players they may have a combination of 3 males and 4 females or visa versa. A team may play with as few as 6 (3 males and 3 females; or 4 males and 2 females and visa versa).

2. A male runner may not advance the ball past the scrimmage line. A runner is considered to be a runner upon possession of the ball. There are no restrictions once the ball is beyond the scrimmage line, during a run by a female or after a change of possession.
   - Penalty: 5 yards from the previous spot.

3. Legal forward passing in Co-Rec Flag Football:
   A. The term “closed” means that a male player may NOT throw a legal forward pass completion to any other male player. The term “open” means any player may complete a legal forward pass to any other player.
   B. During the offensive team’s possession there may not be 2 consecutive legal forward pass completions from a male passer to a male receiver. This rule applies to the try.
   C. If a male passer completes a legal forward pass to a male receiver, the next legal forward pass completion must involve either a female passer or female receiver for positive yards. The spot where the ball becomes dead by Rule must be beyond the Team A scrimmage line. There is NO FOUL for a female receiver being deflagged behind the scrimmage line. In this case the next legal forward pass completion remains “closed.” A running play by a female will NOT “open” the next play.
   D. There are no other restrictions concerning a male passer completing legal forward passes to a female receiver, or female to female, or female to male.
      Penalty: Illegal Forward Pass, 5 yards from the spot where the second consecutive male to male completed legal forward pass is released, and a loss of down.

4. Scoring:
   A. Male to Male scoring → same according to general flag football rules.
   B. Any play with a female involved (prior to a change of possession) → 9 points.
   C. All point after touchdown tries are worth the same as general flag football rules.
5. Mercy Rule:
   A. If a team is 25 or more points ahead when the 2 minute warning is announced in the 2nd half, the game shall be over.
   B. If a team scores in the last 2 minutes of the 2nd half and that score creates a point differential of 25 or more points, the game shall be over.

(Updated July 28, 2011--CB)