INTRODUCTION: The N.I.R.S.A. National Collegiate Flag/Touch Football rules will serve as the reference for all rulings in our Flag Football program, except as noted on this handout.

PLAYERS: A team consists of a maximum of eight players. Any number less than eight may play if they so desire.

PLAYING EQUIPMENT: No article of clothing may cover any portion of a player’s flag.

FLAG BELTS: Each player on the field must wear a one-piece belt at the waistline with 3 flags permanently attached, one flag on each side and one in the center of the back. The flags should be a minimum of 2 inches wide and 14 inches long. The flags must be of contrasting color to the opponent’s flags.

FOOTWEAR: Shoes containing steel or removable cleats will not be permitted. Rubber nub cleats are the only form of cleated shoe which will be allowed. Referees will check all players footwear before the start of the contest. Shoes must be of either a leather or canvas upper with a one-piece molded bottom which may or may not have rubber cleats.

ILLEGAL EQUIPMENT: The use of headgear of any nature, jewelry, shoulder pads, body pads, shoes with removable cleats [regardless of material] or any unyielding or dangerous equipment is prohibited. Players may use an ace bandage no more than two turns thick in any given area; it can be anchored at each end of tape not to exceed two turns. Any slippery or sticky substance of a foreign nature on equipment or exposed part of the body is illegal. When any required player equipment is missing or when illegal equipment is found on any incoming substitute or any player, correction must be made before participation. An official’s time-out shall be declared to permit prompt repair of equipment which becomes illegal or defective through use.

FIELD: Fields shall be divided into four, 20-yard zones plus two, 10-yard end zones. Four downs to cross a twenty yard line [see diagram on last page].

TIME: Game consists of two 20-minute halves.

First 18 Minutes of 1st and 2nd Half: Running Clock. Clock stops only after PAT is attempted, and when there is a timeout either for strategy or injury. After a score, clock restarts when opposing team begins kick return.

Last 2 Minutes of 1st and 2nd Half: NFL Rules. Clock stops for out-of-bounds, incomplete, spiking the ball, after a score, after a kickoff return, 2-minute warning, time outs. Clock does NOT for first downs.

TIME OUTS: Two (2) per team [non-consecutive] of not more than 1 1/2 minutes each, each half; plus one additional time out for overtime period [extension of 2nd half playoff games only]. Unused time outs do not carry over into subsequent period.

COACH-OFFICIAL CONFERENCE: When a team requests a charged time-out for a rule interpretation, the officials will confer with the team captain or coach. If the official changes his/her ruling, it is an official’s time-out. If the ruling is not changed, it is a charged time-out. If the team has used its two time-outs, delay of the game penalty will be assessed.

COIN TOSS OPTION: Because teams do not change ends at each quarter, teams must switch ends at the beginning of the second half. Thus, the team winning the toss at the beginning of the game gets initial choice of [1] kicking, receiving, or, [2] goal to defend with other team getting second choice of options left. At start of second half teams must switch ends with the team which had second choice at the start of the game getting first option concerning kicking and receiving.

SUBSTITUTION: Free substitution at any time, provided players coming off field are off prior to snap.

ELIGIBLE RECEIVERS: All players are eligible receivers.

DEAD BALL FUMBLE: Turnovers as a result of a fumble are not possible in this game. All fumbles [whether they hit the ground or not] are dead balls at the spot of loss of control. There can be no change of possession as a result of a fumble. Any attempt on the part of the defense to “chuck” the ball free will result in an “unsportsmanlike conduct” penalty. Penalty – 10 yards. This rule also applies to blocked kicks, laterals, etc. which are dead at point of contact with ground.
BALL CARRIER STOPPED: “Tackle” occurs whenever an opponent removes ball carrier’s flag. If a player is making a forward “pass” with his/her arm in motion forward there is no “tackle.” Defensive player must have at least one foot in contact with ground to legally remove flag.

If a flag falls off the ball carrier or his/her flag is removed via an illegal method [diving, leaving feet, etc.] the whistle should not be blown. The play is to continue with the runner being stopped via a one-handed touch [no diving or leaving feet] between the shoulders and the knees. Any attempt to stop the ball carrier by grabbing a scrimmage vest or article of clothing or otherwise in an effort to slow down the runner prior to pulling the flag will result in a 10-yard penalty.

All flags must hang freely with no clothing hanging over flags or flag belts. If officials find a flag has been tied or otherwise been tampered with - 10 yard penalty and loss of down.

LEGAL KICKS: A legal kick is a punt, drop kick or place kick by a player in possession of the ball when such a kick is permitted by rules. Any other kick is illegal. ON-SIDE KICKS ARE ILLEGAL IN THIS GAME.

PLACE KICK: A place kick is kicking the ball from a fixed position on the ground or toe. The ball may be held in any position by a member of the kicking team so long as it is not elevated more than 2” above the ground.

OUT OF BOUNDS: A player is out of bounds when any part of his/her body touches anything [other than another player] which is on or outside the boundary line. A free ball or forward pass is out of bounds when it touches the ground, a player or anything else which is on or outside the boundary line.

INADVERTENT WHISTLE: If a whistle is inadvertently blown by an official, the ball is dead immediately as per follows:

- If whistle sounded while offensive team has ball behind line of scrimmage; - down played over from previous spot.
- If whistle sounded after an offensive gain from line of scrimmage - offensive team has option of taking ball at the spot with down counting or of replaying the down from previous spot.

POSSESSION AND DOWN AFTER A PENALTY:

A] Penalty declined: if a penalty is declined, the number of the next down shall be whatever it would have been if a foul had not occurred.

B] Penalty during or between downs: after a distance penalty incurred between downs, the number of the next down shall be the same as that had the foul not occurred.

C] Penalty by both teams: foul by both teams during a down or while the ball is ready for play is to be considered offsetting, and the down is repeated.

FREE KICKS: Restraining lines. On any free kick formation the kicking team’s restraining line will be the yard line through the most forward point from which the ball may be kicked. The receiving team’s restraining line will be 20 yards beyond that point. The kick off team’s restraining line will be the 20 yard line on the kick-off and after a safety, provided no penalty has occurred. [Ball must travel 20 yards to be a free ball.]

FORMATION - No member of the kicking team may touch the ball after the free kick until it has passed the receiving team’s restraining line. Penalty: Receiving team's ball at point of foul.

FREE KICK CAUGHT OR RECOVERED - if a free kick is caught by receiving team, the ball is in play until a fumble or “tackle” occurs. If a kicking team recovers the free kick, the ball becomes dead at spot of recovery and the receiving team retains possession. NOTE: A ball ready for kick-off must be placed on a legal 2” tee or held or Placed on the ground or holder’s toe.

RECEIVING THE KICK-OFF: Any member of receiving team is allowed to catch the kick and advance the ball. A fumble of a kick is dead at the point of contact with the ground. A ball that is kicked into the end zone and downed by the receiving team is ruled dead and brought out to the 20 yard line.

SNAPPING THE BALL: Snapping the ball from a scrimmage line is handing or passing it back from the offensive line with a quick and continuous motion of the hand or hands, the ball actually leaving the hands in this motion. The center cannot “double-clutch” before tossing the ball back to the quarterback. No defensive player is permitted to line up directly over, in line with, or otherwise within 1 yard of the offensive center. Illegal snap - 5 yard penalty from previous spot.
SCRIMMAGE: A team will have four downs in which to score a touchdown or make a first down. A first down will be awarded to the offensive team when they cross any quarter zone line, provided the first down of their series of downs started before the line crossed.

On fourth down, a team must declare to the referee its intention to kick if it intends to do so [this applies to punts and field goal attempts]. The referee then informs the opposing team. Defensive team may not charge, attempt to block or otherwise interfere with the kick.

A. Before the ball is snapped: 1. The center may not make any unnecessary move of ball in attempting to draw a defensive player off-sides; 2. When ball declared ready for play, all offensive players must momentarily be within 15 yards of ball; 3. No false start may be made to draw a defensive player off-sides - 5 yards from previous spot; 4. The offensive team must have at least 4 players on their scrimmage line at the snap.

B. When the ball is snapped. Only one member of the offensive team may be in motion and this must be laterally backwards. Other offensive players must be stationary in position with both feet on ground and no movement or extension of arms, before the ball is snapped. There shall be no contact prior to snap of ball across neutral zone. Upon snap of the ball no player may be in the neutral zone other than the snapper. After the snap there is a 3-second mandatory delay imposed on the defense during which time the defense may not cross the line of scrimmage. This is called the “3-Mississippi” rule. The count is subjective on the part of the official. The defense is responsible for counting to “3-Mississippi” loud enough so the official can hear. Not doing so results in a penalty if they do cross the line of scrimmage. Each set of downs warrants the defensive team one blitz.

C. On punts, punter has “3-Mississippi” to punt. If not, penalty for delay of game.

USE OF HANDS AND ARMS WHEN BALL IS IN POSSESSION:

Helping the runner: the ball carrier shall not grasp a team mate or be grasped, pulled or pushed by a team mate. Penalty: 5 yards.

Offensive use of hands: the offensive team shall be prohibited from obstructing an opponent with extended hand or arm. This includes the use of “stiff arm” extended to ward off an opponent attempting to deflag or touch. Penalty: 10 yards.

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. Penalty: 10 yards.

FLAG BELT ISSUES: Ball carriers shall not guard their flags by blocking with arms or hands the opportunity for an opponent to pull or remove the flag belt - Penalty: 10 yards. Similarly, offensive players may not have an outer garment partially covering the flag belt – Penalty: 5 yards. Flag belt improperly clipped – Penalty: 10 yards, loss of down plus official warning. If occurring second time – Penalty: Disqualification.

OBSTRUCTION OF BALL CARRIER OR OTHER OFFENSIVE PLAYER: The defensive player shall not hold, grasp or obstruct forward progress of a ball carrier when in the act of removing the flag belt or making a legal tag. Also, a defensive back or defensive lineman can not obstruct the progress of a receiver or lineman with any offensive gestures such as pushing or a complete extension of arms. Penalty: 10 yards.

OFFENSIVE SCREEN BLOCKING: The screen blocking rule should be envisioned in much the same manner that picks and screens are used in basketball WITH THE EXCEPTION THAT THE PERSON SETTING THE SCREEN CAN MOVE. Screen blocking is legally obstructing an opponent WITHOUT CONTACTING him/her with any part of the body. The blocker may move as long as this movement is in THE SAME PATH of and IN THE SAME direction of the defensive player. As in basketball, provided the blocker gives the defensive player sufficient room to stop and/or change direction [usually 1-2 steps], the screen block is legal. If, however, the defensive player is “even” with or “around” the blocker [judged by position of shoulders] the blocker may not move into the defensive player at that point in an attempt to cut him/her off. It is the DEFENSIVE PLAYER’S RESPONSIBILITY to avoid contact at all times - defense must go AROUND the offensive player’s screen block. The defense may use the arms and hands as a “wedge” to “wedge” [not charge or run] between two offensive blockers provided this is not done in an aggressive fashion [knocking the offensive blocker aside, etc.]. If two or more offensive blockers are standing shoulder to shoulder, the defense might be better served to go around rather than trying to wedge through. A player must be on his/her feet before, during and after screen blocking. Defensive player must go around an offensive player’s screen block. Illegal contact by defense – Penalty: 10 yards.
The offensive line may not move once the snapper has assumed position for the snap. It is recommended that offensive screen blockers STAND at the line of scrimmage with the hands placed behind the back once on the line and prior to the snap as there will be less chance to be called or use of hands if the screen blocker keeps the hands behind the back throughout the blocking movements.

The ball carrier may not use the “stiff arm” technique to ward off an opponent attempting to deflag or touch.

As might be suspected, with screen blocking, the game is going to be primarily dominated by the pass, using delay patterns and lots of picks and screens downfield. Remember - all players are eligible receivers.

It should also be kept in mind that like basketball or the punting game in regular tackle football, the offense will probably be attempting to “draw” an illegal defense contact or “charge.”

**PLAY THE BALL CARRIER – NOT THE INTERFERENCE.**

An illegal contact arising from the screen block [whether on defense or offense] will result in a **10 yard penalty** from previous spot.

A player who screens shall not:

a] When he/she is behind a stationary opponent, take a position closer than a normal step from opponent.

b] When he/she assumes a position at the side or in front of a stationary opponent, make contact with opponent.

c] Take a position so close to a moving opponent that this opponent can not avoid contact by stopping or changing direction. The speed of the player to be screened will determine where the screener may take his/her stationary position. This position will vary and may be one to two normal steps or strides form the opponent.

d] After assuming his/her legal screening position move to maintain it, unless he/she moves in the same direction and path of his/her opponent. If the screener violates any of these provisions and contact results, he/she has committed a personal foul. Penalty: 10 yards.

**FLAG BELT REMOVAL:** There are some tenants or basic rules which are established for flag football because of legal or illegal removal of the flag belt:

a] Deflagging [removal of the flag belt by a player] is allowed only under special circumstances similar to tackling in football. Offensive players must have possession of the ball before they can legally be deflagged.

b] A flag belt which becomes detached inadvertently [not removed by grabbing and pulling} does not cause play to stop. Play should continue as if the flag belt had not been removed.

c] In circumstances where a flag belt is removed illegally, play should continue with the option of the penalty or the play. Penalty: 10 yards.

d] In all situations where a play is in progress and a ball carrier loses the flag belt either accidentally, inadvertently, or on purpose, the deflagging reverts to a one-hand touch of the ball carrier between the shoulders and knees.

e] If a ball carrier’s knee is down, and he has not had his flags removed, he is not down until he is touched on the ground or his flags are removed.

f] If flag is gripped and yanked hard and does not come off, player down.
SUMMARY OF PENALTIES

Loss of 5 Yards:
- Delay of game
- Kick-off out of bounds – possession at 30 yard line or re-kick from 15
- Free kick out of bounds
- Interference with opponent or ball before snap
- False start or any illegal act by the snapper
- Defensive encroachment
- Illegal position at snap
- Offensive player illegally in motion
- Illegal shift
- Illegally handing ball forward [also loss of down]
- Illegal forward pass [also loss of down]
- Putting ball in play before declared Ready for Play
- Article of clothing covering portion of a player's flag
- Protected scrimmage
- Helping runner
- Intentional grounding (loss of down)
- Invalid or illegal fair catch signal
- Exceeding 25 second count
- Offensive player not within 15 yards of ball

Loss of 10 Yards:
- Delaying start of either half
- Offensive forward pass interference [loss of down]
- Defensive forward pass interference [automatic first down]
- Holding or illegal block
- Striking, kicking, kneeing [also disqualification] fighting.
- Clipping
- Tripping, striking head or neck with heel, back or side of hand
- Unsportsmanlike player conduct
- Illegal participation
- Unsportsmanlike conduct by coach or attendant
- Fair catch interference
- Interlocked interference
- Illegal use of hands or arms
- Roughing the passer
- Unnecessary contact of any nature
- Quick kick
- Hurdling
- Throwing runner to ground
- Contact with opponent on ground
- Drive or run into player
- Illegal offensive Screen Blocking
- Defensive use of hands
- Guarding the flag belt
- Stiff arm
- Slowing down runner in effort to grab flag

DISQUALIFICATION ASSOCIATED WITH CERTAIN 10-YARD PENALTIES

Striking, kicking, kneeing

Any act listed above is unduly rough or flagrant

All forms of aggressive violent behavior directed at players, spectators, or officials will result in automatic expulsion from the contest. Further sanctions include a one game suspension for the first offense and suspension for the remainder of the season for the second offense.

Intentional tampering with flag belt (loss of down)
Penalty enforcement philosophy is based on the fact that a team is given the advantage of the distance which is gained without assistance of a foul. It is assumed that the only foul which would give this aid is a foul by the offense behind the basic spot. Therefore, all foul but this one, that is a foul by the offense behind the basic spot, are penalized from the basic spot. This one foul is penalized from the spot of the foul.

If a foul occurs during a loose ball play (free kick or protected scrimmage kick; a legal forward pass; a backward pass or fumble behind line of scrimmage) the basic enforcement spot is the previous spot, either the spot of the snap or the free kick.

If a foul occurs during a running play (a run which is not followed by a loose ball behind line; a run which is followed by an illegal pass from behind the line; any run beyond the line), the basic enforcement spot is the spot where the run ended.

**Loss of Down Fouls** (also loss of 5 yards)

A. Illegally handing ball forward
B. Illegal forward pass
C. Forward pass interference

**Automatic First Downs** (also loss of 10 yards)

A. Forward pass interference by defense
B. Roughing the passer

**FORWARD PASS INTERFERENCE:**

Contact: During a down in which a legal forward pass is thrown, contact which interferes with an eligible receiver who is beyond the neutral zone is pass interference unless it occurs when two or more eligible receivers make a simultaneous and bona fide attempt to reach, catch or bat a pass.

Offensive Interference: After the ball is snapped, and until it has been touched by a receiver, there shall be no offensive interference beyond the line of scrimmage while the ball is in flight. Penalty: 10 yards from the previous spot.

Defensive Interference: After the pass is thrown by the passer, and until it is touched, there shall be no defensive interference beyond the line of scrimmage while the ball is in flight. Penalty: 10 yards from the previous spot and an automatic first down.

NOTE: If the pass interference by either player is intentional or unsportsmanlike, his/her team shall be penalized an additional 10 yards.

P.A.T. Ball is snapped on the 3 YARD LINE after a touchdown. At this time, the team that scored is given one play to score after touchdown. “Points after” may be scored via kick [either held or by a drop kick] - 1 point; or a pass/run - 2 points. After a touchdown has been made, the offensive team MUST announce their extra point intent [kick or run] to the defensive team. If the choice is to kick, there is to be no coverage from the defensive team.

SAFETY: Normally a safety is made when a ball which is legally in possession and control of a player within his/her own end zone becomes dead, any part of it being on, above, or behind the goal line, provided the impetus which sent it to or across the goal line was given by a player on his own team. After a safety is scored, the defending team shall put the ball in play on its own 20 yard line by a free kick. Safeties may be scored in the following ways: 1. tagging a member of the offensive team in possession of the ball behind his own goal line; 2. if a member of the offensive team steps out of his/her own end zone with the ball in possession.

**VALUE OF SCORES:** Touchdown - 6 points; field goal - 3 points; safety - 2 points; P.A.T. [kick] - 1 point; P.A.T. [run] - 2 points.

**TOUCHBACK:** A touchback shall be called when the ball crosses the opposing team's goal line, and is touched by the receiving team of the kickoff, regardless of where the ball originally lands. [On a punt situation, the receiving team does not need to gain possession.] The ball shall be brought out to the 20 yard line and put into play.
TIE GAMES: Regular league games ending in ties GO TO OVERTIME. A coin flip will determine normal options as at the start of the game. The team which gets first possession, takes possession at the 20 yard line and gets 4 downs to score [run, pass or kick]. The opposing team then gets an identical opportunity from the 20 to either win or tie. If still tied, the process is repeated until a winner is determined.

GAME CLOCK: The clock will start when the ball is legally snapped. It will run CONTINUALLY for the first 18 minutes of each half unless it is stopped by:

☐ Try-for-point [restarts when ensuing kickoff is legally touched]

☐ Team or injury time-out [restarts on the ensuing snap]

☐ The end of 18 minutes of FIRST OR SECOND HALF prior to the 2-minute warning [restarts depending upon previous play]

NOTE: In order to keep play running in a timely fashion, teams will have NO MORE than 30 seconds to prepare for the next down after the ball has been declared ready for play. Violation of this time limit will result in a five [5] yard Delay of Game penalty.

During the final two minutes of each half the clock stops for:

a] Incomplete pass [restarts on ensuing snap]
b] Out-of-bounds [restarts on ensuing snap]
c] Penalty and administration of [restarts depending upon previous play]
d] Touchdown [restarts when kick-off is legally touched]
e] Team time-outs [restarts on ensuing snap]
f] Referee’s discretion [restarts at his/her discretion]
g] Fair catch [restarts on ensuing snap]
SCREEN BLOCKING RULES CLARIFICATIONS

The screen blocking rule should be envisioned in much the same manner that picks and screens are used in basketball with the exception that the person setting the screen can move. Screen blocking is legally obstructing an opponent WITHOUT CONTACTING him/her with any part of the body. The blocker may move as long as this movement is in the same path of AND in the same direction of the defensive player. As in basketball, provided the blocker gives the defensive player sufficient room to stop and/or change direction [usually 1-2 steps], the screen block is legal. If, however, the defensive player is "even" with or "around" the blocker [judged by position of shoulders] the blocker may not move into the defensive player at that point in an attempt to cut him/her off. IT IS THE DEFENSIVE PLAYER'S RESPONSIBILITY TO AVOID CONTACT AT ALL TIMES - defense must GO AROUND the offensive player's screen block. The defense may use the arms and hands as a "wedge" to "wedge" [not charge or run] between two offensive blockers provided this is not done in an aggressive fashion [knocking the offensive blocker aside, etc.]. If two or more offensive blockers are standing shoulder to shoulder, the defense might be better served to go around rather than trying to wedge through.

The offensive line may not move once the snapper has assumed position for the snap. Offensive screen blockers may not overlap or interlock. The defense may blitz; however, as mentioned earlier, the onus is on the defense for avoiding contact [they usually must go around a block].

Since the offense may not use their hands or arms in blocking, it is recommended that the screen blockers stand at the line of scrimmage with the hands placed behind the back once on the line and prior to the snap. There will be less chance to be called for use of hands if the screen blocker keeps the hands behind the back throughout the blocking movements. Likewise, the ball carrier may not use the "stiff arm" technique to ward off an opponent attempting to deflag or touch.

As might be suspected, with this rules change to screen blocking, the game is going to be primarily dominated by the pass. Remember - all players are eligible receivers.

It should also be kept in mind that like basketball or the punting game in regular tackle football, the offense will probably be attempting to "draw" an illegal defense contact or "charge."

PLAY THE BALL CARRIER - NOT THE INTERFERENCE.
All illegal contact arising from the screen block [whether in defense or offense] will result in a 15 YARD PENALTY from previous spot.