

The following rules have been discussed and agreed upon by all of the communities in the Southwest Michigan Rocket Football Organization in March 2025 for use in play during the 2025 season. All 2025 revisions to the rules are **highlighted in yellow**. If you have any questions concerning rules, see your league director for any clarifications. All referees should have a copy of these rules well in advance of any game. These rules are set up in such a way to provide a safe, fair, and fun learning experience for all of those involved in Flag Football. If at any time you observe any of these rules not being followed, please contact your community director.

Leagues: Rookie – Ages 6-8.

Junior – Ages 9-11.

Section I: *Equipment and Facilities*

A. Football Size: Rookie - Pee Wee (average weight 11 ounces) Junior – Junior (average weight 12.5 ounces)

B. Required Equipment:

- a. Players will be provided flag belts with flags that are uniform for the entire team and are a contrasting color with the team's shorts/pants. All flags must be pointing down and angled away from the body with one on each hip **and the slack of the belt should be secured. Refs should line players up before the game to check on uniformity of belts.**
- b. Shoes: Cleats or tennis shoes. However, cleats with exposed metal are not allowed.
- c. Mouth guards are optional while on the field of play.
- d. Pants or shorts - **Encourage no pockets on shorts for player safety.**
- e. Players may wear gloves, elbow and knee pads.
- f. Jerseys must be tucked into the pants or shorts if they hang below the belt.
- g. No jewelry or a player must tape the earring studs

Section II: *Practices and Games*

- A. Practices can start on August 1
- B. MHSAA policy for Managing Heat & Humidity will be modified for Flag Football to include cancellation of practices and games if the Heat Index is 99 degrees.
- C. Follow MHSAA rules for lightning and thunder. Every lightning strike, play must be postponed for 30 minutes. D. All communities will comply with the Michigan Sports Concussion Law which includes mandatory concussion awareness through an on-line training program for coaches, a signed statement from parents acknowledging receipt of educational materials and written clearance from a health professional for any player suspected of sustaining a concussion.

Section III: *Participants:*

- A. Rookie: Ages: 6, 7 and 8
- B. Junior: Ages: 9, 10, 11, 12 if in 6th grade
- C. Age is determined by player's age on *August 1st of a given year*. All participants must be registered with a birth certificate on file with their league director before practicing or playing in a game.
 - a. Each team will keep registration forms with participants' name and birth date on file with the league Director.
- D. Team rosters will be shared between the league directors prior to the season to share electronically with each team. E. Coaches are asked to use common sense and distribute the ball-carrying responsibilities to multiple players. **F. Substitutes can play one time for another team in their community if it is approved by the flag director of the opposing team.**

Section IV *Game Rules:*

- A. Games will be played with 7 players on the field for each team for Rookie and 6 players on the field for each team for Junior.
- B. Game Play:
 - a. At the start of each game, captains from both teams shall meet at midfield for the coin toss to

- determine who shall start with the ball. The visiting team shall call the toss.
- b. The winner of the coin toss has the choice to start on offense or defense. The loser of the coin toss has the choice of direction.
- c. The offensive team takes possession of the ball at its 10-yard line and has four (4) plays to cross midfield. Once a team crosses midfield, they have four (4) plays to score a touchdown. **FOR BOTH LEVELS IN 2025: If the team is stopped on 4th down, the defense gets the ball where the ball is downed. Or the offense can "punt" and the other team takes possession on their own 10- yard line.**
- d. If the offense fails to score, the ball changes possession and the new offensive team starts its drive from its own 10-yard line. The only exception to this is on an intercepted pass not taken in for a score. Interceptions will be placed where the intercepting team gets their flag pulled.
- e. Teams change sides after the first half. Possession changes to the team that started the game on defense.
- f. Any offensive play that is stopped behind the 5-yard line or in the end-zone will be spotted at the 5-yard line. There are no safeties against the offense.
- g. All snaps must come from the ground, and the play starts when the center moves the ball.
- C. Games will consist of two **twenty-five minute** halves, running clock. **The clock will stop only on injuries and time-outs..**
- D. Teams will have a 30-second play clock from the time the ball is placed. Referees will warn a team once, and on the second infraction, the team will incur a 5-yard penalty and a loss of down. E. A mercy rule will go into effect when either team has a lead of 35 points or more in the 2nd half of the game. At that point, no more points will be added to either score, however the teams will continue to play. This would be a good time to give more playing time or ball carries to players who don't receive as much.
- F. Teams will receive **(4) 60-second time-outs per game.**
- G. Junior Level - Maximum of 1 coaches on the field during play for offensive side of the ball and 0 coaches for defensive side of the ball. Rookie Level – Maximum of 2 coaches on the field for both sides of the ball.
- H. Field Dimensions and Layout.
 - a. Field dimensions are 30 yards by 70 yards (50 yards between goal lines) including two 10-yard end zones. Line to gain is at Midfield. No Run Zones precede each line-to-gain by 5 yards. b. No-Run Zones are in place to prevent teams from conducting power run plays in short yardage. While in the No-Run Zone, teams cannot run the ball in any fashion. With all pass plays, the ball must travel past the line of scrimmage to the receiver, even if they include a handoff.
 - c. Stepping on the boundary line is considered out of bounds.
 - d. Each offensive squad approaches only two No-Run Zones in each drive (one zone 5 yards from midfield to gain the first down, and one zone 5 yards from the goal line to score a TD).
- I. Scoring:
 - a. Touchdown: 6 points.
 - b. A point after attempt will be given. A team can choose to have the ball placed at the 5-yard line for a 1-point attempt or the 10-yard line for a 2-point attempt. Either place, a team can choose to run or throw the ball. Turnovers on the conversion attempts is a dead ball at the rookie level. At the junior level, two points will be awarded to a defensive team who intercepts an extra-point and returns it for a touchdown.
 - c. Safety: There are no safeties. Any flag pull in a player's own end zone results in the ball being spotted at the 5 yard line.
- J. No turnovers as a result of fumble. If a ball is fumbled, the play is dead and the ball is spotted where it hits the ground and it counts as a play. The ball should be spotted where it hits the ground. A fumbled ball can't gain positive yards. If a ball is fumbled forward of the ball carrier, then it is ruled down where the carrier's feet were. The exception to this rule is a fumbled snap between the QB and Center.
 - a. Fumbled snaps. If the center to QB exchange is fumbled (including shotgun snaps), the ball can be picked up **ONLY** by the offense and play will continue. If the defense recovers a fumbled snap there is no change of possession, merely a loss of down for the offense.

- b. Any ball that is in the air, including laterals, can be caught by the defensive team and returned for yardage.
- K. Interceptions may be returned by the intercepting player for positive yards and/or a score. L. After touchdown possession changes to the other team, who takes over at their own 10 - yard line.
- M. Flags and belts must be exposed and free from obstruction and secure the tail. No towels, handwarmers, or other obstruction to the flags/belts are allowed.
- N. Blocking: No Blocking or Intentional Screening Allowed.
- O. Rushing the passer: A defensive player may not cross the line of scrimmage until the ball changes hands, unless the defensive player is designated as a rusher.
 - a. All players who rush the passer must be a minimum of ten (10) yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped. Up to two players can rush the quarterback. Players who do not rush may play defense on the line of scrimmage until the ball changes hands from the quarterback to another player. The quarterback is any player who takes a snap from the center. The quarterback may not advance the ball across the line of scrimmage unless he is receiving a forward pass not from him/herself.
 - b. Once the ball is handed off, the ten-yard rule is no longer in effect and all defenders may go behind the line of scrimmage.
 - c. Once the ball has left the quarterback's hands, it is considered a change of hands and the defense can cross the line of scrimmage.
 - d. A special marker, or the referee, will designate a Rush Line ten yards from the line of scrimmage. Defensive players should verify they are in the correct position with the official on every play.
 - a) Legal rush is:
 - i. Any rush from a point 10 yards from the defensive line of scrimmage.
 - ii. A rush from anywhere on the field AFTER the ball has been handed off by the quarterback.
 - iii. If a rusher leaves the rush line early (breaks the 10-yard area), they may return to the rush line, reset and then legally rush the quarterback.
 - iv. If a rusher leaves the rush line early and the ball is handed off before they cross the line of scrimmage, they may legally rush the quarterback.
 - b) Illegal rush: A penalty is only to be called if the offending player pulls the flag or impedes the progress of the ball carrier.
 - i. The rusher leaves the rush line before the snap crosses the line of scrimmage before a handoff or pass. – Illegal Rush (5 yards LOS).
 - ii. Any defensive player, not lined up at the rush line crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is passed or handed off. – Illegal Rush (5 yards LOS)
 - c) Special Circumstances:
 - i. Teams are not required to rush the quarterback.
 - ii. Teams are not required to identify their rusher before the play; however, if they do send a rusher, the rusher must verify with the official that they are in the correct position.
 - iii. If a rusher leaves the 10-yard line before the snap, he/she may immediately drop back to act as defender with no offside penalty enforced.
 - e. Players rushing the quarterback may attempt to block a pass; however, NO contact can be made with the quarterback in any way. Blocking the pass or attempting to block the pass and then making contact with the passer will result in a roughing the passer penalty.
 - f. The offense cannot make intentional contact with a Rusher who started 10 yards behind the defensive line of scrimmage. **The offense should avoid the rusher as an intentional contact penalty could be called if an offensive player impedes or sets a screen on a rusher which**

results in a collision.

- g. A sack occurs if the quarterback's flags are pulled behind the line of scrimmage. The ball is placed where the quarterback's feet are when flag is pulled.
- P. The ball is spotted where the ball is when the flag is pulled.
- Q. Runners may not leave their feet to advance the ball. Diving, leaping or jumping is considered flag guarding. Runners may leave their feet if there is a clear indication that they have done so to avoid collision with another player without a flag guarding penalty enforced. Spinning is allowed, but players cannot leave their feet.
- R. Flag Pulling:
- a. A legal flag pull takes place when the ball carrier is in full possession of the ball.
 - b. Defenders can dive to pull flags, but cannot tackle, hold or run through ball carrier when pulling flags.
 - c. It is illegal to attempt to strip or pull the ball or pull from the ball carrier's possession at any time.
 - d. If a player's flag inadvertently falls off during the play, the player is down immediately upon possession of the ball and the play ends.
 - e. A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off of a player who is not in possession of the ball.
 - f. Flag guarding is an attempt by the ball carrier to obstruct the defender's access to the flags by stiff arming, dropping of head, hand, arm or shoulder, or intentionally covering flags with the football or jersey.
 - g. Ball carriers MUST make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position.
 - h. Defenders are not allowed to run through the ball carrier when pulling flags.
 - i. Players may not grab clothes or flag belts, if they incidentally grab clothes they must release immediately.
- S. Pass Clock: **FOR BOTH LEAGUES** - The quarterback must hand the ball off or pass it within seven seconds. The ref on the sideline will count out loud the **seven-second clock**. Ball is spotted back at the line of scrimmage. It is treated as an incomplete pass and the next down will be played.

Section V Penalties:

- The referee will call all penalties.
- Referees determine incidental contact that may result from normal run of play.
- All penalties will be assessed from the line of scrimmage, except as noted (spot fouls).
- Only the team captain or head coach may ask the referee questions about rule clarification and interpretations. Players cannot question judgment calls.
- A half cannot end on a defensive penalty, unless the offense declines it.
- Penalties are assessed Live Ball then Dead Ball. Live Ball penalties must be assessed before play is considered completed.
- Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal yardage when the penalty yardage is more than half the distance to the goal.
- Unsportsmanlike conduct or Unnecessary Roughness on Offense or Defense results in a 10-yard penalty anywhere on the field. If penalty is called on the offense after scoring a touchdown, then the opposing team will get the ball at the 20-yard line to start their offensive possession (10-yard penalty) On the second unsportsmanlike conduct penalty, the offending player will be ejected from the game.

Offensive Penalties – EVERY PENALTY IS 5 YARDS and LOSS OF DOWN ON ALL PENALTIES

- Illegal Equipment Line of Scrimmage (LOS)
- Offside LOS
- Illegal motion (more than one person moving, false start, etc.) LOS
- Delay of game (30 seconds after ball is set) LOS
- Illegal forward pass in passing zone (received behind the quarterback or thrown after crossing LOS) LOS
- Illegal Quarterback sneak (QB advances beyond LOS) LOS
- Offensive pass interference (illegal pick play, pushing off/away) LOS
- Blocking/Intentional Screening downfield LOS
- Unnecessary Roughness LOS

- Flag guarding LOS
- Illegal snap LOS

Defensive Penalties - EVERY PENALTY IS 5 YARDS AND REPEAT THE DOWN ON ALL PENALTIES

- Offside LOS
- Defense Illegal contact (holding, blocking, etc.) LOS
- Defense Illegal flag pull (before runner/receiver has ball) LOS
- Defense Illegal rushing (if illegal rusher disrupts the play) LOS
- Defensive Pass Interference LOS
- Roughing the passer LOS
- Stripping the football SOF
- Unnecessary roughness – Defense SOF + additional 5 yards

Section VI Terminology:

Boundary lines – the outer perimeter lines around the field including the sidelines, and the rear end zone lines.

Line Of Scrimmage (LOS) – an imaginary line running through point of football and across the width of the field.

Line-To-Gain – the line the offense must pass to get a first down or score.

Rush Line – an imaginary line running across the width of the field 10 yards (into the defensive side) from the Line of Scrimmage.

Offense – the squad with possession of the ball.

Defense – the squad opposing the offense to prevent them from advancing the ball.

Passer – the offensive player that throws the ball and may or may not be the QB.

Rusher – the defensive player assigned to rush the Quarterback to prevent him/her from passing by pulling his/her flags or blocking the pass.

Downs (1-2-3-4) – the offensive squad has four attempts or “Downs” to advance the ball.

They must cross the Line to Gain to get another set of downs or to score.

Live Ball – the period of time that the play is in action. Generally used in regards to penalties, Live Ball Penalties are considered part of the play and must be enforced before the down is considered complete.

Dead Ball – the period of time immediately before or after a play.

Whistle – the sound made by an official using a whistle that signifies the end of the play or a stop in the action for timeout, half time or the end of the game.

Inadvertent whistle – an official's whistle that is performed in error.

Flag Guarding – An act by ball carrier to prevent a defender from pulling ball carrier's flags by stiff arm, lowering elbow, or head and or by blocking access to the runner's flags with hand or arm.

Shovel Pass – a legal pass attempted behind the line of scrimmage by throwing the ball underhand or pushing it towards a receiver in a shot put type manner

Lateral – a backwards or sideways toss of the ball by the ball carrier.

Screening - intentionally impeding the free movement of a defender
Field Layout and Marking

