



Unified Sports[®] Flag Football Officials Manual

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The official rules and officiating mechanics for Unified Sports® Flag Football shall govern all Champions Together competition. This set of rules is based on the Flag Football rules adopted by USA Football in partnership with the NFL, as modified by Special Olympics in July 2019.



I. INTRODUCTION

Unified Sports® is a trademarked program of Special Olympics, Inc. that promotes sports training and competition for teams that include people with and without intellectual disabilities.

The focus of Unified Sports® is competition (not simply participation). Sports teach many life lessons: to work as a team, to follow rules and to be committed. Through sports we can find shared interests that allow friendships to form. By creating high expectations for students with intellectual disabilities we teach a new generation of regular education students that people with intellectual disabilities can be accountable, follow rules, be good teammates; and, as a result will be accepted as valued members of their school, community, or society in general.

Champions Together is a joint effort between the IHSAA and Special Olympics Indiana (SOIN) to incorporate Unified Sports® programs in IHSAA member schools recognizing and offering opportunities for students with and without disabilities to compete in an IHSAA sanctioned activity.

- Unified Sports® programs shall be administered by each participating member school and follow the requirements per IHSAA Bylaws for eligibility, rules, and program administration.
- Unified Sports® tournaments shall be administered by the IHSAA staff and the rules as approved by the IHSAA will govern the sport when applicable.



UNIFIED SPORTS® FLAG FOOTBALL OFFICIALS MANUAL

Unified Sports® Flag Football uses a three-person officiating crew.

- Referee (R)
- Linesman (L)
- Line Judge (LJ)

Unless otherwise noted in this document, the basic principles of high school football mechanics and game management apply.

II. UNIFORM

The standard high school football officials uniform is approved for use in Unified Sports® Flag Football. This includes:



- 2" Striped Shirt (long or short sleeve)
- Black Striped Officials Slacks
- Football Officials Cap (white for referee)
- Black Belt
- Black Shoes and Socks
- Whistle
- Yellow Penalty Flag
- Bean Bag
- Game Card

III. PRE-GAME

The officiating crew shall follow this pregame procedure before each game.

1. **All officials**
 - a. inspect the field for safety
 - b. observes teams to ensure legal equipment
2. **Referee** verifies timing procedures with Timer.
3. **Linesman** checks down box and reviews procedures with down box official.
4. **Line Judge** obtains and approves game ball(s) and meets with ball person(s).
5. Crew meets with head coaches, starting with the home team coach to verify team is legally equipped, reinforce the importance of sideline control, obtain captains' numbers, and check for any unusual / trick plays, and ensure line-up cards listing athletes and partners have been exchanged.
6. Crew meets with captains (one athlete and one partner) at midfield.
7. Following coin toss, move to positions at the appropriate end of the field and be prepared for start of the contest.

IV. COIN TOSS

1. The coin toss should be held at midfield three minutes before the scheduled start of the game.
2. Have captains face each other with their backs to their sideline.
3. In the presence of the crew, referee instructs the visiting team speaking captain to give “heads” or “tails” choice before the coin toss.
4. Referee tosses coin and determines the winner.
5. The winner of the coin toss will choose offense, defense or end of field to defend. The team winning the coin toss may also defer its choice to the second half.
6. Referee moves captains to face the appropriate goal line and signals “First Down” while standing next to captains of the team who will first possess the ball.

V. SCRIMMAGE PLAYS

Referee

1. To start the game:
 - a. Spots ball on the 5-yard line.
 - b. Moves to a position approximately 10 yards from the line of scrimmage on the throwing-hand side of the quarterback.
 - c. Signals “first down.”
 - d. When teams are ready to start, signals Ready for Play.
 - e. Responsible for offensive team’s goal line. (possible safety for muffed snap)
2. For each play:
 - a. Spots the ball at the middle of the field.
 - b. Moves to a position approximately 10 yards from the line of scrimmage on the throwing-hand side of the quarterback.
 - c. Communicates to offensive team for all “No Run” plays (play within 5 yards of midfield or opponent’s goal line)
 - d. Observes offensive team action before the snap.
 - e. After the snap:
 - 1) Monitors action of the quarterback
 - 2) Ensures offensive player(s) screening defenders are not initiating contact
 - 3) Monitors passes – no backward passes, must cross line of scrimmage
 - 4) Marks forward progress behind line of scrimmage
 - 5) Sounds whistle immediately if muffed or fumbled ball strikes the ground.
 - 6) Follows play if ball proceeds downfield.
 - f. When play ends, spot the ball and signal the next down.
 - g. Monitor 30 seconds allowed before next snap. (delay of game)
 - h. Signals first down if play ends beyond midfield.

Linesman

1. To start the game:
 - a. Straddles the 5-yard line one yard beyond the sideline on the visiting team's side of the field.
 - b. Signals down.
 - c. Counts the members of the offensive team.
2. For each play:
 - a. Mark forward progress for all plays ending beyond the line of scrimmage.
 - b. Straddle the line of scrimmage one yard beyond the sideline on the visiting team's side of the field.
 - c. Signal the down.
 - d. Monitor substitutions.
 - e. Observe the line of scrimmage for encroachment or false start. (dead ball foul)
 - f. Legality of running plays to your side of the field.
 - g. Pass plays to your side of the field up to 20 yards downfield.
 - h. Responsible for your sideline.
 - i. Communicate first down to referee if ball is advanced beyond midfield.

Line Judge

1. To start the game:
 - a. Straddles the 12-yard line one yard beyond the sideline on the visiting team's side of the field.
 - b. Signals down.
 - c. Counts the members of the defensive team.
 - d. Establishes communication with defenders planning to rush the quarterback.
2. For each play:
 - a. Mark forward progress for all plays ending more than 10 yards beyond the line of scrimmage.
 - b. Straddle the line 7 yards beyond the line of scrimmage one yard beyond the sideline on the home team's side of the field.
 - c. Signal the down.
 - d. Monitor substitutions.
 - e. Ensure defenders rushing the quarterback are at least 7 yards beyond the line of scrimmage (your position) before the ball is snapped.
 - f. Legality of running plays to your side of the field.
 - g. Pass plays to your side of the field up to 20 yards beyond the line of scrimmage and all passes more than 20 yards beyond the line of scrimmage.
 - h. Responsible for your sideline.
 - i. Responsible for goal line.

VI. EXTRA POINT

1. Immediately after a touchdown, referee obtains offensive team's choice for either a one or two-point attempt.
 - a. Spot ball at 5-yard line for one-point attempt.
 - b. Spot ball at 12-yard line for two-point attempt.
 - c. If the offensive team fails to communicate its choice within 5 seconds, place the ball at the 5-yard line for a one-point attempt.
2. Crew officiates play according to standard play mechanics.
3. Signal "touchdown" or "incomplete" at the end of the extra point attempt.
4. Place ball at the 5-yard line for the succeeding possession.

VII. TIME-OUTS

1. Each team has one time-out per half. Each time-out is one minute in length.
2. When requested, the covering official signals time out and the team who requested it.
3. The **Referee** mirrors the signal, then moves to ball.
4. All officials mark their game card accordingly.
5. The **Linesman and Line Judge** monitor team activity at the sideline during the time-out, then beckons the team to return to the field upon a signal (whistle) from the Referee after 45 seconds of the time-out.
6. The **Referee** signals "Ready for Play" at 60 seconds, and the offensive team then has 30 seconds to snap the ball.

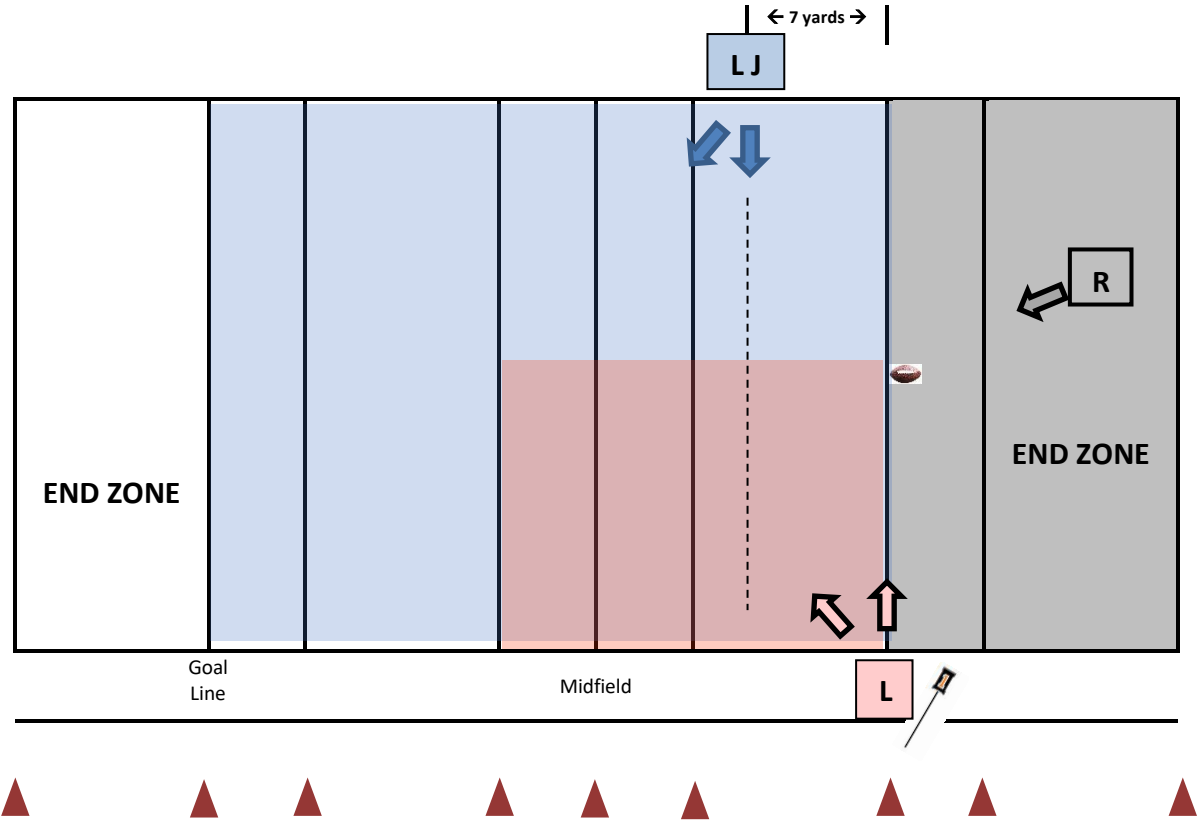
VIII. ADMINISTERING PENALTIES

1. The clock does not stop for penalty administration until the last minute of each half, so officials must move expeditiously.
2. Fouls before or at the snap (false, start, offsides, delay of game, illegal motion) are 5 yards from the line of scrimmage. The down remains the same.
3. All other fouls (offense or defense) are 10 yards (or half the distance to the goal) and are measured from the previous spot. These offensive team fouls include a loss of down. Defensive team fouls include an automatic first down.
4. Double fouls offset, and the down is replayed.
5. Ensure the down box is not moved until the penalty is marked off.
6. The calling official(s) communicate fouls to the **Referee** who signals to press box (visiting) side of the field; then marks the distance off for the penalty.
7. The **Linesman** proceeds to the succeeding spot, then instructs the down box to be moved.
8. The **Line Judge** moves to the previous line of scrimmage and remains there until the penalty is enforced.

IX. OVERTIME

1. An overtime period is untimed play after a regulation game has ended with the score tied. During an overtime period each team has an opportunity for an offensive series of downs. However, an overtime period may include only one offensive series of downs if the defensive team scores.
2. The team scoring the greater number of points in the overtime shall be declared the winner. The final score shall be determined by totaling all points scored by each team during both regulation time and overtime periods.
3. All regulation rules and penalties are in effect.
4. Following a three-minute intermission, a coin toss is held in the same manner as the pregame toss.
5. The same end of the field will be used for possessions by both teams during each overtime period to ensure equal game conditions and conserve time.
6. If the score remains tied after an overtime period, then the procedure shall be repeated with other overtime periods until a game winner is determined.
7. If multiple overtimes are necessary, teams will alternate the choice of offense, defense or end of field without a coin toss (i.e., the team captains who did not have first choice in the first overtime will have first choice to start the second, etc.).
8. Each team will be allowed 1 time out per overtime period. Time outs do not carry over.
9. Team possession for each team in overtime starts at the 12-yard line.
10. The first offensive team shall have a series of four downs. That series shall be terminated by any score by the offensive team or if the defensive team gains possession of the ball.
11. If the team on offense scores a touchdown, it is entitled to the opportunity for an extra point attempt unless the points would not affect the outcome of the game (i.e., no try will be attempted if the winner of the game has been determined).

X. POSITIONS AND COVERAGE FOR A SCRIMMAGE PLAY



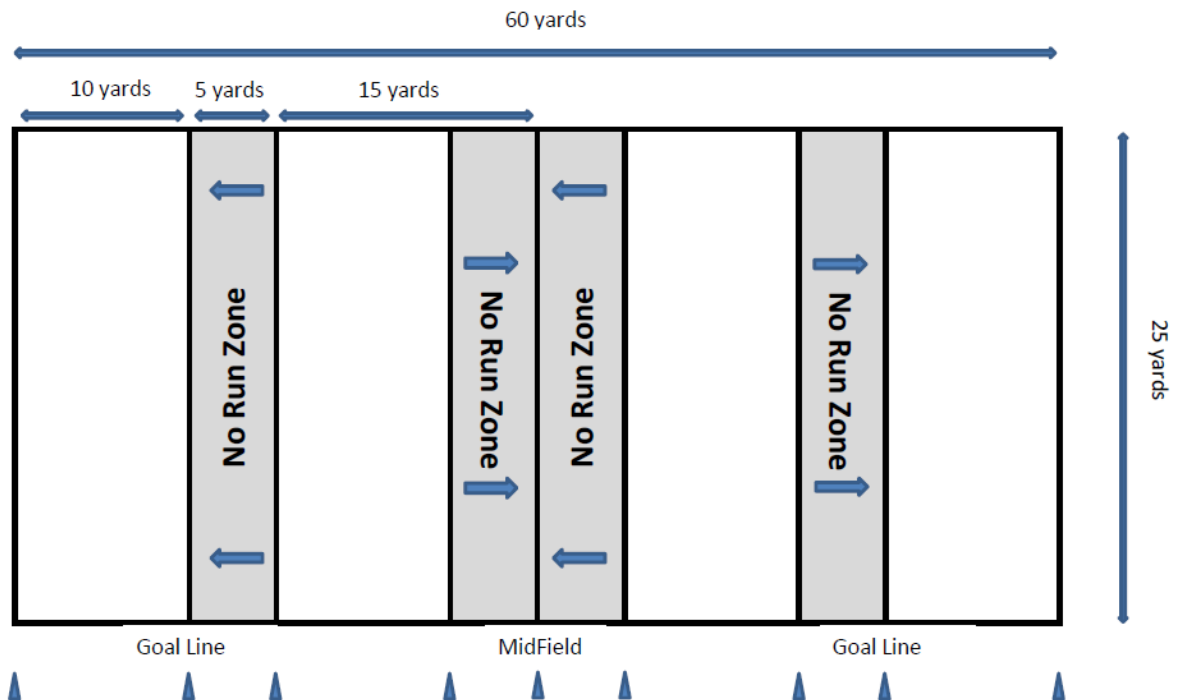
XI. UNIFIED SPORTS® FLAG FOOTBALL FUNDAMENTALS

- a. Unified Sports® Flag Football is non-contact.
- b. In all aspects of Unified Sports® Flag Football, rulings shall be made with player safety as the primary consideration.
- c. The roster shall contain a proportionate number of athletes (students with disabilities) and partners (students without disabilities).
- d. During competition, teams shall field five players to start the game (required).
 - a. The line-up shall never exceed three athletes and two partners at any time.
 - b. Teams may continue with a minimum of four players (minus one partner or athlete) due to disqualification or injury.
- e. Failure to adhere to the required ratio results in a forfeit.
- f. The coach is responsible for the line-up and conduct of the team during competition.
- g. A partner as quarterback may NOT pass to another partner.
- h. Partners MAY handoff to another partner.
- i. Possessions
 - i. All possessions, except following an interception, start at the offensive team's 5-yard line.
 - ii. The offense has four plays to cross midfield.
 - iii. Once the offense crosses midfield, they have four additional plays to score a touchdown.
 - iv. If the offensive team fails to cross midfield 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.
 - v. The ball carrier may not spin, dive, hurdle, stiff arm, or use either arm to shield a defender from grasping his/her flag.
 - vi. The forward progress spot is the position of the ball is when the player is declared down (carrier's flag belt is pulled or anything other than the runner's hand or foot touches ground).
 - vii. The ball is spotted near the middle of the field for each down by the Referee.
- j. Unfair Acts
 - i. No team shall repeatedly commit penalties/fouls which halve the distance to the goal line.
 - ii. 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 penalties/fouls to gain an advantage.
 - iii. The referee will enforce any penalty he/she considers equitable, including the award of a score for an unfair act.
- k. Partners shall NOT dominate play (as determined by a Games Committee).










XII. PLAYING FIELD






1. The playing field is 60 yards long (including the end zones) and 25 yards wide. If insufficient space is available, a slightly smaller space can be used.
2. A space of at least 5 yards around the field must be free and clear of obstructions. The field can be marked with chalk, paint, and/or traffic cones.
3. "No Running Zones" are located 5-yards before the midfield line and goal line.
 - i. Any ball snapped from these zones must be passed.
 - ii. The purpose of "No Running Zones" is to avoid short yardage power running situations.












Diagram of Flag Football Playing Field



XIII. PENALTY CHART

Offensive Team Penalties		
<p>Delay of Game <i>5 yards, down remains the same</i></p>	<p><i>Failing to snap the ball within 30 seconds of the Ready for Play.</i></p>	
<p>False Start <i>5 yards, down remains the same</i></p>	<p><i>Shift or feigned charge that simulates action at the snap</i></p>	
<p>Flag Guarding <i>10 yards from the line of scrimmage and loss of down</i></p>	<p><i>Diving, spinning, warding off, or hurdling to prevent defender from pulling flag.</i></p>	
<p>Illegal Contact <i>10 yards from the line of scrimmage and loss of down</i></p>	<p><i>Holding, blocking, bumping, stiff arming and defender</i></p>	
<p>Illegal Forward Pass Backward Pass <i>10 yards from the line of scrimmage and loss of down</i></p>	<p><i>Pass not completed beyond the line of scrimmage; any backward pass; partner to partner pass; pass made from beyond line of scrimmage</i></p>	
<p>Illegal Motion <i>5 yards, down remains the same</i></p>	<p><i>More than one player moving at the snap; moving forward at the snap</i></p>	
<p>Illegal Procedure <i>10 yards from the line of scrimmage and loss of down</i></p>	<p><i>Quarterback runs beyond line of scrimmage</i></p>	
<p>Intentional Grounding <i>10 yards from the line of scrimmage and loss of down</i></p>	<p><i>Pass intentionally thrown into an area not occupied by an eligible receiver, pass intentionally thrown to save loss of yardage</i></p>	
<p>Pass Interference <i>10 yards from the line of scrimmage and loss of down</i></p>	<p><i>Interfering with an opponent's opportunity to move toward or catch as pass</i></p>	

Defensive Team Penalties		
Illegal Contact <i>10 yards from the line of scrimmage and automatic first down</i>	<i>Holding, blocking, bumping, or attempting to strip the ball from the runner</i>	
Illegal Flag Pull <i>10 yards from the line of scrimmage and automatic first down</i>	<i>Pulling the flag before a receiver catches the ball</i>	
Illegal Rushing <i>10 yards from the line of scrimmage and automatic first down</i>	<i>Rushing the quarterback from closer than 7 yards from the line of scrimmage</i>	
Offside <i>5 yards, down remains the same</i>	<i>Being in or beyond the line of scrimmage at the snap</i>	
Pass Interference <i>10 yards from the line of scrimmage and automatic first down</i>	<i>Interfering with an opponent's opportunity to move toward or catch as pass</i>	

Other Officials Signals	
Dead Ball	
Disqualification	
End of Period	
First Down	
Illegal Participation	
Incomplete Pass	
Loss of Down	
Ready for Play	
Safety	
Time-out	
Touchdown	
Unsportsmanlike Conduct	