



PITTSBURGH NATIONAL LEAGUE

2026 RULE BOOK



GAME FORMAT

1. NFL Flag Football is played 5 vs. 5.
2. A coin toss determines the first possession
3. Only rostered players and coaches are allowed on the sideline. All coaches must call plays from the sideline unless during a timeout. Rookie League coaches are allowed on the field. Family members, parents, and spectators are required to observe the contest from the designated areas. **This will be strictly enforced**
4. Possession starts at the five-yard line.
5. There are “no-run zones” 5 yards before the first down marker and 5 yards before the end zone. Inside these zones, the offense must pass the ball. If a run is attempted, it results in a 5-yard penalty, and the down is consumed. Direct handoffs are allowed but must result in a pass. Although the offense has to run in the “no-run zones,” direct handoffs are allowed.
Rookie League only, the teams can run anywhere on the field. The “no-run zones do not exist in the Rookie League.
6. You will have **three** downs to get a first down and a touchdown. On **fourth** down, **ONLY BEFORE THE FIRST DOWN**, you have the option of going for the first down. If you choose not to go for fourth down, the other team takes over at its five-yard line. If a team decides to go for it on fourth down and doesn't make the line to gain, then the opposition takes over possession at that spot at the end of the play.
 - a. **Offensive Teams MUST declare 4th down intent when asked by the officials.**
7. Interceptions can be returned in all age groups.
8. There are no fumbles. The ball is dead when it hits the ground or comes out of the runner's hands.
9. Teams change sides after the first half. Possession changes to the team that started the game on defense.

PLAYER REGISTRATION

1. All players are to be registered through our league website.
2. The registration deadline is Saturday, April 11th. No roster changes or substitutions will be allowed after this date.

ROSTERS

1. Home teams wear dark color jerseys. Visiting teams wear light color jerseys.
2. Team Rosters must consist of at least 5 players with a maximum of 12 players.
 - a. A team may play with no more than 5 players and no fewer than 4 players on the field.
 - b. In the event of an injury, a team with insufficient substitute players may play with 4 players on the field but no fewer than 4.
 - c. If at the start of a game a team has fewer than 4 players, that game will be a forfeit and 35 points will be awarded to the opposing team.

SEASON

1. Teams will play 7 regular-season games. Rookie League will play 7.
2. Teams have the opportunity to participate in multiple tournaments throughout the season.
3. Playoff rounds are single elimination.
4. Divisional playoff seeds are determined by:
 - a. Overall record
 - b. Points allowed
 - c. Points scored
 - d. Coin toss

TIMING

1. Games are 40 minutes total, with two 20-minute halves.
2. The clock runs continuously and only stops for timeouts or at the official's discretion.
3. **If a team leads by 35 points at any time, the game is over (Mercy Rule).**
4. The offense has 25 seconds to snap the ball once it is spotted. Delay of game results in a 5-yard penalty and loss of down.
5. Each team gets **three (3) timeouts per game.**
6. If the game is tied, we go into overtime. A coin toss will determine who gets the ball first, and they have the option to go for one or two. Each team will get the ball at the five-yard line in the same endzone. If the first team scores, the other team has a chance to match it. If they do, then we go into a second overtime. If not, the game is over. If the first

team doesn't score and the second team does, the game is also over. If after the second overtime and the game is tied, the game will be decided on the longest play. Each team will get one play from the 5-yard line. The team that goes first will be the same team that started the first overtime.

SPORTSMANSHIP & CONDUCT

Spectator Conduct: Fans must adhere to good sportsmanship.

- **The Penalty:** If a spectator is abusive or disruptive, the referee will penalize the **Team associated with that fan**.
- **Penalty:** -5 Yards & Loss of Down (Offense) or +5 Yards & Automatic First Down (Defense).
- **Removal:** The referee has the authority to remove any spectator from the facility. If they refuse to leave, the game is forfeited.

The referee will issue one warning when appropriate before enforcing a spectator penalty, unless the behavior is extreme.

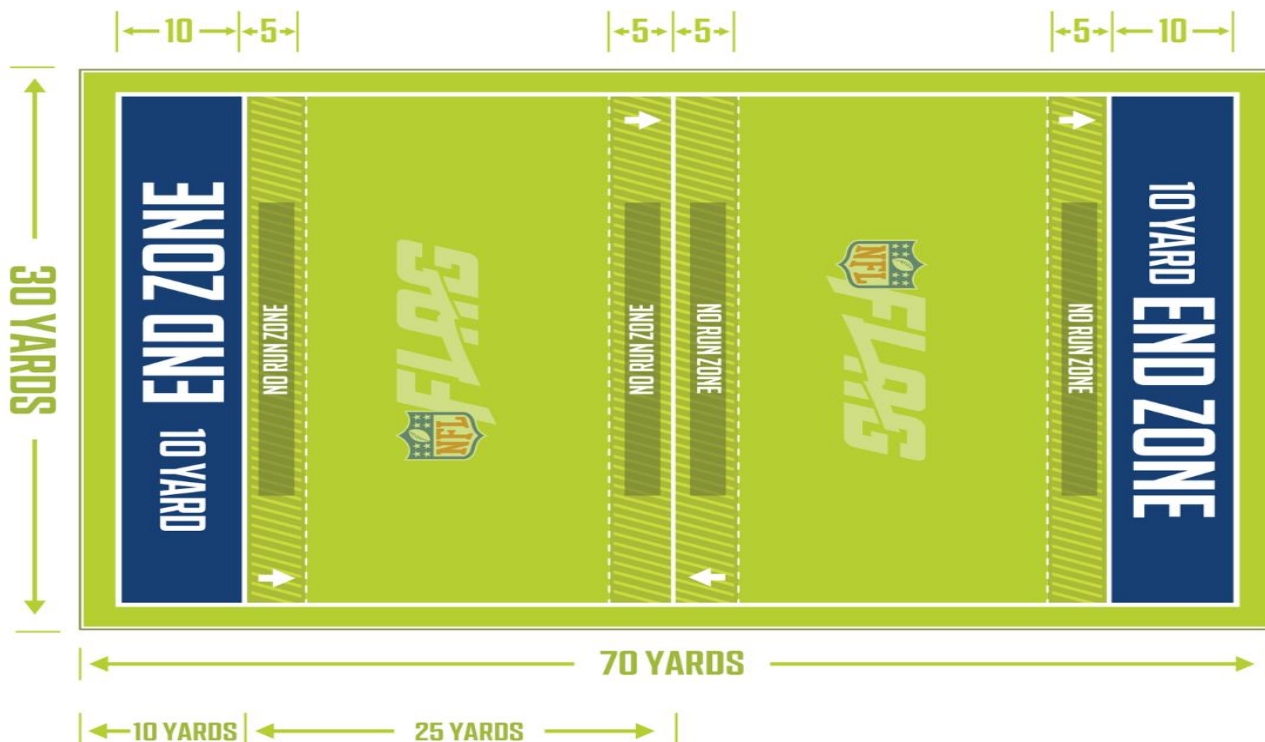
EQUIPMENT

1. All players must wear official NFL Flag belts and mouth guards at all times while on the playing fields.
2. Players must wear shoes, preferably cleats. However, cleats with metal are never allowed and must be removed.
3. Players must remove all jewelry and hats with brims.
4. Players' jerseys must be tucked into shorts or pants.
5. Shorts or pants **may not have pockets of any kind**. Pocket taping is not permitted. (Updated for 2026)
6. Flag belts cannot be the same color as the shorts or pants.
7. Players who do not have a mouth guard during the game will not be allowed to be on the field, as the mouth guard is considered mandatory.

FIELD

1. The field dimensions are 30 yards by 70 yards with 10-yard endzones.
2. No-run zones are in place to prevent teams from conducting power-run plays. While in the no-run zones (5yards midfield, and before the

endzone) teams cannot run the ball in any fashion. All plays must be a pass play. However, in the Rookie League, teams can run every play, there are no no-run zones.



SCORING

1. **Touchdown:** 6 points
2. **Extra point:** 1 point (played from 5-yard line and must pass)
2 points (played from the 10-yard line and can either run or pass)
3. **Safety:** 2 points
 - a. A safety occurs when the ball-carrier is declared down in his/her own end zone. Runners can be called down when their flags are pulled by a defensive player, a flag falls out, they step out of bounds, their knee or arm touches the ground, a fumble occurs in the end zone, or if a snapped ball lands in or beyond the end zone.

4. Extra points that are intercepted and returned equals 2 points
5. A team that scores a touchdown must declare whether they wish to attempt a 1-point conversion (from the 5-yard line) or a 2-point conversion (from the 10-yard line). Any change, once a decision is made
6. to try for the extra point requires a charged timeout. A decision cannot be changed after a penalty.
7. After one team is winning by 35 points or more, the game will end no matter the time. Once a 35-point or more advantage, no PAT will be attempted.
8. Forfeits are scored 35-0 for the winning team.

RUNNING

1. The quarterback cannot directly run with the ball.
2. Direct handoffs, pitches, and passes behind the line of scrimmage are allowed.
3. Spinning is allowed, but players can't leave their feet to avoid the defense.
4. **The ball is placed where the ball is when the flag is pulled.**
5. There is no blocking allowed.
6. Any player who receives a handoff can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage.
7. Once the ball has been handed off, all defensive players are eligible to rush.

RECEIVING

1. All players are eligible to receive passes.
2. A player must have at least one foot inbounds when making a reception.
3. Only one player is allowed in motion at a time. All motion must be parallel to the line of scrimmage, and no motion is permitted toward the line of scrimmage.
4. In the case of simultaneous possession by both an offensive and defensive player, possession is awarded to the offense.

PASSING

1. All forward passes must be received beyond the line of scrimmage.
2. A player may throw the ball backward to a teammate who is behind the line of scrimmage. This can be done multiple times, as long as each backward pass is made to a player positioned behind the one who threw it.
3. Shovel passes are allowed but are to be caught beyond the line of scrimmage.
4. In both age divisions, the QB has seven seconds to pass the ball. Once the ball is handed off, the seven-second rule is no longer in effect.
 - a. If the QB is standing in the end zone at the end of the 7-second clock, the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage.
5. A player who takes a handoff can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage.

DEAD BALLS

1. The ball must be snapped between the legs to start the play.
2. Play is ruled dead when the following happens:
 - a. Ball carrier's flag is pulled or falls off during the play
 - b. Ball carrier steps out of bounds
 - c. Touchdown or safety is scored
 - d. Ball carrier's knee hits the ground
 - e. Ball carrier loses control of the ball, and it hits the ground
 - f. Ball carrier catches the ball or receives a handoff with one or no flags on. Where they get the ball will become the new line of scrimmage.
 - g. After an interception, if the ball hits the ground, the play is dead at that spot.

Inadvertent Whistle: If an official blows the whistle inadvertently during a play:

3. The team in possession has the option to:
 - a. Take the ball at the spot where the whistle blew.
 - b. Replay the down from the original line of scrimmage.

Note: If the ball was in the air when the whistle blew, the down is replayed.

RUSHING THE QUARTERBACK

1. A maximum of 2 designated defensive rushers may legally rush the quarterback. All designated rushers must identify themselves, with their hand raised until the snap, to legally rush from the 7 yard rush line. Designated rushers are not obligated to rush, but if they do, they must rush immediately upon the ball being snapped. (New for 2026)
2. Players not rushing the quarterback may defend up near the line of scrimmage.
3. A marker or the referee will designate the seven-yard mark.
4. Once the ball is handed off, any defender can go after the ball carrier.
5. The defense cannot cross the line of scrimmage until the quarterback hands the ball off.
 - a. A legal rush is:
 - i. Any rush from a point 7-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.
 - b. A penalty may be called if:
 - i. The rusher leaves the rush line before the snap and crosses the line of scrimmage before a handoff or pass – an illegal rush (5-yards from the line of scrimmage)
 - ii. Any defensive player crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped – defensive offsides (5-yards from the line of scrimmage)
 - iii. 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 from the line of scrimmage).
 - iv. If the offense draws the rusher(s) to jump the 7-yard marker before the snap of the ball, that rusher(s) CAN NOT rush during that play. However, any other defender that is seven yards back may rush instead. Jumping the rush is not a penalty; the rusher crosses the line of scrimmage prior to the handoff or passed ball.

6. Players rushing the quarterback may attempt to block a pass; however, contact to the QB, unless ruled incidental by the official, would result in a roughing the passer penalty.
7. The offense cannot impede the rusher in any way. The rusher has the right to a clear path to the quarterback, regardless of where they line up before the snap. The PATH is set pre-snap from the rusher or rushers directly to the QB. PATH does not move once the quarterback moves. If the “path or line” is occupied by a moving offensive player, then it is the offense’s responsibility to avoid the rusher. Any disruption to the rusher’s path and/or contact will result in an impeding the rusher penalty. If the offensive player does not move after the snap, then it is the rusher’s responsibility to go around the offensive player and avoid contact.

FLAG PULLING

1. A legal flag pull takes place when the ball carrier is in **full** possession of the ball.
2. Defenders can dive to pull flags but cannot tackle, hold, or run through the ball-carrier when pulling flags.
3. It is illegal to attempt to strip or pull the ball from the ball carrier’s possession at any time.
4. If a player’s flag inadvertently falls off during a play while that player has possession, the player is down immediately and the play ends. The ball is placed where the flag lands.
5. If a player who has one or no flags in their belt takes possession of the ball, the play is dead at that spot on the field.
6. A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off of a player who does not have the ball.
7. Flag guarding is an attempt by the ball carrier to obstruct the defender’s access to the flags by stiff-arming, dropping the head, hand, arm, or shoulder, or intentionally covering the flags with the football jersey.

ROOKIE LEAGUE RULES (AGES 4-6)

The Rookie League has its own set of simplified and development-focused rules to ensure players are learning the game in a fun and structured environment:

1. GAME FLOW & COACHING

- **Play Clock:** The offense has **40 seconds** to snap the ball once it has been spotted.
- **Coaches on Field:**
 - **One coach** per team is allowed on the field to direct players.
 - **Offensive Coaches:** Must line up **5 yards deeper** than the deepest player on the field.
 - **Defensive Coaches:** Must leave the field once the quarterback begins their cadence.

2. OFFENSIVE ALIGNMENT & RUNNING

- **Alignment:**
 - The **Center** is the only player required to be on the Line of Scrimmage.
 - The other four players may line up anywhere on or off the line.
- **Running the Ball ("Fair Distribution" Rule):**
 - To encourage teamwork, the **same player cannot run the ball across the line of scrimmage on two consecutive plays.**
 - *Example:* If Vernon runs the ball on 1st Down, Vernon **cannot** run the ball on 2nd Down. They must hand it off to someone else or go out for a pass.
 - *Exception:* A player who ran on the previous play **IS eligible** to catch a pass on the next play, provided the catch is made **beyond the line of scrimmage.**
- **Penalty for Consecutive Runs:**
 - If the same player runs twice in a row, the play is blown dead immediately after that player crosses the line of scrimmage. This includes extra-points

- **Result: Loss of Down.** The ball returns to the original Line of Scrimmage. No yardage is lost.
- **No "No-Run Zones":** Rookie League teams can run the ball on any play from anywhere on the field (including near the Goal Line), subject to the consecutive run rule above.

3. DEFENSIVE ALIGNMENT (The 5-Yard Buffer)

- **Standard Alignment:** Defensive players must begin each play lined up at least **5 yards off the ball**. They cannot press the receivers or the line of scrimmage.
 - *Why:* This creates space for plays to develop.
 - **Penalty:** Defensive Offsides (+5 Yards & Automatic First Down).
- **The "Goal Line" Exception:**
 - If the ball is spotted **inside the 5-yard line** (or less than 5 yards to the First Down marker), the defense does not have to back up 5 yards.
 - **Rule:** They may line up on the **Goal Line** or the **First Down Line** (whichever is applicable).
 - *Example:* If it is 3rd and Goal from the 2-yard line, the defense lines up on the Goal Line (2 yards back), not 5 yards deep in the end zone.

4. DEFENSIVE RESTRICTIONS

- **No Rushing/Blitzing:** The defense **cannot rush the quarterback**.
- **Crossing the Line:** Defenders can only cross the line of scrimmage **after** the handoff.
- **Once the Handoff Occurs:** There are no restrictions. Defenders can cross the line immediately to pull the flag from anywhere on the field.

5. SPECIAL NOTES

- **Purpose:** These rules are strictly enforced to help young players learn positioning, spacing, and teamwork without the pressure of complex blitz packages or dominant solo performances.

PENALTIES- Officials' judgment calls (including flag guarding, contact, and sportsmanship) are final and not subject to protest. All penalties and punishments are up to the referee's discretion based on the seriousness of the play.

1. Defensive penalties

- a. Offsides (or crossing the line of scrimmage before handoff)- 5 yards and automatic first Down
- b. Interference- spot foul and an automatic first down
- c. Illegal contact (holding, tackling)- 10 yards and an automatic first down
- d. Illegal rushing (starting rush from inside 7-yards)- 5 yards and an automatic first down

2. Offensive penalties

- a. False Start- 5 yards and a loss of down
- b. Delay of Game- 5 yards and a loss of down
- c. Offsides- 5 yards and a loss of down
- d. Illegal forward pass- 5 yards and a loss of down
- e. Offensive pass interference- 10 yards and a loss of down
- f. Flag Guarding- 5 yards from the spot of the foul and a loss of down
- g. Blocking- 5 yards from the spot of the foul and a loss of down
- h. Illegal Snap- 5 yards and a loss of down
- i. Impeding the rusher- 5 yards and a loss of down

3. Unsportsmanlike conduct

- a. If a referee witnesses any acts of intentional tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, blocks, or any unsportsmanlike act, the game will be stopped and the player will be ejected from the game. The decision is made at the referee's discretion. No appeals will be considered. FOUL PLAY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED!
- b. Offensive or confrontational language is not allowed. Officials have the right to determine offensive language. If offensive or confrontational language occurs, the referee will give one warning. If it continues, the player or players will be ejected from the game.
- c. Players may not physically or verbally abuse an opponent, coach or official.

- d. Ball-carriers MUST make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position.
- e. Defenders must give free releases off the line of scrimmage to offensive players and are not allowed to run through the ball carrier when pulling flags. ROUGH PLAY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED!
- f. Fans must also adhere to good sportsmanship as well. The team associated with the offending fan will face -5 yards and a loss of down.
- g. - 1st offense- out for a possession, 2nd offense- ejected from the game. Anytime a player gets ejected, he or she will be out for their next game as well. As a result, a player gets ejected from two games they are suspended for the remainder of the season.

