

Flag Football Rules Handbook

Fall 2025

OFFENSIVE PENALTIES

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Illegal Formation	1 st Offense: Warning, Additional: 5 yards	Line of Scrimmage	Repeat Down	6
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DEFENSIVE PENALTIES

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Pass Interference	10 Yards	Line of Scrimmage	Automatic First Down	7
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Unsportsmanlike Conduct	10 Yards	End of Play If occurred on a touchdown, then half the distance to the goal will be assessed on PAT and no-run zone still applies for the 1-point try.	Automatic First Down	1, 9

- In the case of an <u>inadvertent whistle</u>, the offense has two options: 1) Take the ball where the runner's front foot was when the whistle blew, with loss of down, or 2) Replay the down from the original line of scrimmage.
- Penalties are assessed in this order: live ball then dead ball. Live-ball penalties must be assessed before play is considered completed.
- If **penalties offset** each other, the ball goes back to the original line of scrimmage with no loss of down.



Blocking—Legally obstructing an opponent without initiating contact with any part of the blocker's body.

Boundary lines—The outer perimeter lines around the field. They include the sidelines and the rear end zone lines.

<u>Charging</u>—The movement of the ball carrier directly at a defensive player who has established position on the field. This includes lowering the head, making contact with the defender with a shoulder, chest, or forearm.

Dead ball—The period of time immediately before or after a play.

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

<u>Downs (1-2-3-4)</u>—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.

Inadvertent whistle—An official's whistle that is performed in error.

Lateral—A backward or sideways toss or pass of the ball by the ball carrier.

<u>Line of scrimmage</u>—An imaginary line running across the width of the field that indicates where the football is placed (or "spotted") before a play begins, as determined by the referee.

<u>Line-to-gain</u>—The line the offense must pass to get a first down or score.

<u>Live ball</u>—The period of time that the play is in action. Live ball penalties are considered part of the play and must be enforced before the down is considered complete.

<u>Neutral zone</u>—An imaginary zone, running across the width of the field before the start of a play, separating the offensive team from the defensive team. Its width is from the front point to the back point of the football.

Offense—The squad with possession of the ball.

Passer—The offensive player who throws the ball; this may or may not be the quarterback.

<u>Rush line</u>—An imaginary line running across the width of the field 10 yards (into the defensive side) from the line of scrimmage.

<u>Rusher</u>—The defensive player assigned to rush the quarterback to prevent him/her from passing by pulling his/her flags or blocking the pass. The rusher must start their rush from behind the rush line.

<u>Shovel pass</u>—A legal pass attempted by throwing the ball underhand or pushing it toward a receiver in a shot put—type manner.

<u>Start Line</u> – The 5 yard line (7-yard line for 13U/14U/15U/16U) where the play starts at change of possession.

<u>Unsportsmanlike conduct</u>—Rude, confrontational, or offensive behavior or language.



The league will provide each player with an official PAL jersey, which must be worn and tucked in during games. **HOME** team will wear the **blue** side, and the **VISITING** team will wear the **white** side. Players must wear shoes. Cleats are allowed, however cleats with exposed metal are not allowed and must be removed. Players may tape their forearms, hands and fingers. Players may wear gloves, elbow pads, and knee pads. Braces with exposed metal are not allowed.

- Players must remove all clothing, equipment, watches, earrings, and any other jewelry that the officials deem hazardous. No face paint, except for eye black.
- Players are not permitted to wear bandanas. Hats may not have a bill. Players may wear knit fleece stocking caps or elastic headbands and skull caps.
- Colored mouth guards are mandatory for all players.
- No player shall participate in either practice or games while wearing illegal equipment. This includes any
 hard substance in its final form such as leather, rubber, plastic, plaster, or fiberglass when worn on the hand,
 wrist, forearm, or elbow.

FLAG BELTS

The flag belt must be completely visible at all times. It cannot be tucked in or covered by the jersey. No shorts/pants can be worn that are of similar color to the flags. This includes similar color stripes on sides of shorts/pants.

Referees will check the scoring player's belt after each score. If a belt is found to be tampered with in any
way that may inhibit the flag from being pulled, the team will lose the last play and the opposing team
will receive the ball on their own start line. Repeat infractions of the same team will be noted and the
coaches will be subject to ejection and possible dismissal from the league pending a formal review by the
competition committee.

BALL SIZES

U4, U5/U6 : Trophy	U7/U8, U9/U10 : Peewee Size		
U11/U12: Junior Size	U13/U14, U15/U16: Youth Size		



The referees will call all penalties. The benefiting team may elect to either accept or decline each penalty, with exception of dead-ball penalties, which are always enforced.

- Referees determine incidental contact that may result from normal run of play.
- All penalties will be assessed from the line of scrimmage, except those noted as spot-of-infraction penalties.
- Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal yardage when the penalty yardage is more than half the distance to the goal.
- Only the head coach may ask the referee questions about rule clarification and interpretations. Assistant
 coaches, parents and players cannot question judgment calls.
- Games and halves cannot end on a defensive penalty, unless the offense declines it.
- Penalties are assessed in this order: live ball then dead ball. Live-ball penalties must be assessed before play
 is considered completed.



Prior to each game, referees will check both teams for equipment compliance, and a game ball will be agreed upon by both coaches. Captains from both teams will meet at midfield for the coin toss to determine who starts with the ball. The visiting team calls the toss. The winner will have their choice of beginning the game on offense or choosing which goal to defend. Games are played 6 v 6. Teams may play with fewer than 6 players on the field. If a team cannot field 6 players, the participating coaches can mutually decide to play with fewer. Games will not be rescheduled because a team cannot field 6 players.

The offensive team takes possession of the ball at its start line and has four (4) downs to cross midfield. Once a team crosses midfield, it has four (4) downs to score a touchdown. If the offensive team fails to cross midfield or fails to score, the ball changes possession and the opposition starts its drive from its own start line. All possession changes, except interceptions, start on the offensive team's start line. The team that started the game on offense will begin the second half on defense. Teams will also switch end zones. **Substitutions are allowed between plays for both defense and offense**.

GAME TIME

Games are played with two (2) 25-minute halves. A "two-minute warning" will be announced by the officials when there are approximately two minutes remaining in each half. However, it is each team's responsibility to monitor the time remaining on the clock. Halftime will last for up to five (5) minutes.

- The game clock is controlled by the referee and will be a continuous clock, except for: <u>timeouts</u> (each team has three (3) 60-second timeouts per half), injuries (the clock will stop until the injured player is removed from the field of play), and <u>at official discretion</u>.
- **During the** <u>last 2 minutes</u> of game play in <u>both the first and second halves</u> the clock stops (and will restart after the next offensive snap) for: <u>a change of possession</u>, <u>a score</u> (clock won't run during any PAT), <u>timeouts</u> <u>by either team</u>, and <u>enforcement of a penalty</u> (restarting once the ball is spotted ready for play).
- Offensive Delay-of-Game: The offense fails to snap the ball within 30 seconds of the official spotting the ball.
- <u>Defensive Delay-of-Game</u>: After a change of possession, the defense exceeds 20 seconds to take their positions.

OVERTIME

If the score is tied at the end of regulation play, both teams go into overtime.

- The winner of a coin-toss will either choose whether to play offense/defense, or which end of the field to play on. The opposing team will make the other choice.
- Each team has 1 attempt at scoring the PAT in each round. The 1-point PAT is still a no-run zone.
- No interception is returnable. All regulation rules and penalties are in place. *There are no timeouts*.
- For the first round, teams alternate attempting a 1-point PAT.
- In the second and subsequent rounds, the order of offense switches. Each team elects whether to go for a 1- or 2-point PAT.
- Overtime rounds continue until, after both teams have attempted their PAT, the score is no longer tied.



Touchdowns are worth 6 points. PATs can be 1 or 2 points. Safeties are worth 2 points.

POINT AFTER TOUCHDOWN (PAT)

The scoring team may elect to try for 1 point (from the other team's start line) or 2 points (from 7 yards beyond the 1-point PAT line). **The 1-point PAT is always a no-run zone**, but 2-point PAT can be run or pass. Any change after a decision is made to try for the extra point requires a charged timeout. The decision cannot be changed after a penalty. Interceptions on PATs cannot be returned.

SAFETIES

A safety occurs when the ball carrier is declared down in their own end zone. They can be called down when their flag is pulled or falls off, they step out of bounds, they fumble the football or they hit the ground with any body part other than the foot or hand. A safety also occurs when there is an offensive penalty in the endzone.



It is a fundamental core belief of PAL Football that coaches demand sportsmanship from their players and, equally important, lead by example. Coaches must always remember that the players look to them for positive life skills and values.

- Coaches must have a valid badge to be on the sideline or field. Officials will check badges before game play.
- Only coaches on the sidelines are allowed to direct players during the play.
- Coaches that are on the field of play may not speak to nor direct players in any way once the ball is snapped. Further, coaches that are on the field of play must remain at least 10 yards behind the deepest player when the ball is snapped and during the play. An unsportsmanlike penalty will be called by the referees for illegal coaching after the snap. A second violation will result in another unsportsmanlike penalty and the coach will be moved to the sideline for the remainder of the game.
- U4, U5/U6: One coach is allowed on the field to assist in offense and defense for the entire game.
- **U7/U8**: One coach is allowed on the field to assist in calling offensive plays. No coach is permitted on the field while on defense.
- **U9/U10**: One coach is allowed on the field to assist in calling offensive plays. No coach is permitted on the field while on defense.
- U11/U12, U13/U14, U15/U16: All coaches must be off the field by the snap of the ball.

DOWN / RUSH MARKER

The visiting team will provide 2 volunteers (aged 18 or older) to control the down marker and rush marker. The down marker will be placed at the line of scrimmage, as indicated by the referee. The chain will be stretched taut, and the rush marker will be placed on the side of the defense, indicating the 'rush line'. **The down marker will not be moved nor the down increased until indicated by the referee.**

- **U4, U5/U6**: The visiting team only needs 1 volunteer if the down marker is used.
- **U7/U8**: The visiting team only needs to provide 1 volunteer, since the rush marker is not used.



The ball is live at the snap of the ball and remains live until the official whistles the ball dead. **The official will indicate the neutral zone and line of scrimmage**. It is an automatic dead ball foul if any player on defense or offense enters the neutral zone. Regarding the neutral zone, the official may give both teams a "courtesy" neutral zone notification to allow their players to move back beyond the line of scrimmage.

- Play is ruled "dead" when the ball or any part of the ball carrier's body (other than the foot or hand) hits the
 ground, the ball carrier's flag is pulled or falls off, the ball carrier steps out of bounds, any score is made, the
 pass clock expires, or an official blows his whistle.
- In the case of an <u>inadvertent whistle</u>, the offense has two options: 1) Take the ball where the runner's front foot was when the whistle blew, with loss of down, or 2) Replay the down from the original line of scrimmage.



If the ball is dropped or otherwise fumbled, including a bad snap or a lateral pass that hits the ground, the play is blown dead.

- If the ball is fumbled **backward**, the ball is placed <u>where it first hits the ground</u>. If the ball is fumbled **forward**, the ball is placed <u>where the ball carrier's front foot</u> was when the ball was fumbled. If the fumble happens **in their own end zone**, <u>it is a safety</u>.
- **Fumbles are not recoverable**. No change of possession occurs on a fumble, unless the fumble occurs on fourth down.
- Defensive players cannot intentionally try to cause a fumble. This is an illegal contact penalty.

FLAG PULLING

A legal flag pull takes place when the ball carrier is in full possession of the ball and involves a motion to de-flag ONLY. 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.

- Defenders can dive to pull flags. <u>An illegal contact</u> occurs if they tackle, hold, grab any article of clothing, or run through the ball carrier when pulling flags.
- An illegal flag pull occurs if a defender intentionally pulls the flag of a player not in possession of the ball and that player then catches the ball.
- A flag guarding penalty is any 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.

ILLEGAL CONTACT

Charging, running through an opposing player who has position on the field, on either offense or defense, is illegal. **ANY CONTACT** other than deflagging against a passer in a passing motion is a penalty. Illegal contact is also contact made during pass routes by either offensive or defensive player, prior to a ball being thrown which obstructs either the running of a route or the allowance of coverage of that route.

• All efforts must be made to reduce all but incidental contact. It is **not illegal contact** when players' feet get tangled while running nor light incidental contact that does not obstruct.

OFFENSIVE FORMATIONS

An offensive team must have a minimum of **two players on the line of scrimmage**. The quarterback must be off the line of scrimmage. After change of possession, offense must wait for the defense to be ready.

- No triple stacking or more of wide receivers parallel to the sidelines. No offensive player may line up within 1 yard of the sidelines.
- In the no-run zone, no offensive player (except the quarterback) may line up within 2 (two) yards of the center.
- One player may be in motion behind, and parallel to, the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.
 Offensive players must come to a complete stop for one second before the ball is snapped (unless he/she is the one player in motion). <u>A false start</u> is movement by a player who is set (unless they are going in motion) or a player who runs toward the line of scrimmage while in motion.
- The center must snap the ball with a rapid and continuous motion between his/her legs to a player in the backfield, and the ball must completely leave his/her hands.
- Illegal motion is motion by more than one player or an illegal snap by the center.



Only one forward pass per play is permitted. All forward passes must be from behind the line of scrimmage. The quarterback's front foot must be completely behind the line of scrimmage when throwing a pass. Shovel passes are allowed.

Pass-Clock: If a pass is not thrown within the allotted "pass-clock", the play is dead, the down is lost, and the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage. Once the ball is handed off or lateraled, the "pass clock" is no longer in effect. If the quarterback is standing in his/her end zone at the end of the "pass clock" and his/her flags have not been pulled, the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage with loss of down (this is not a safety). If the defense has rushed, the quarterback is running to avoid the rusher, and the front foot of the quarterback crosses the line of scrimmage before the "pass clock" expires, the "pass clock" is no longer in effect. Otherwise, the play is blown dead, and the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage with loss of down.

- **U4, U5/U6**: There is no pass clock. The quarterback may NOT directly run with the ball. It must be first handed off or passed to another player.
- **U7/U8**: The quarterback has a <u>7-second</u> pass-clock to get rid of the ball. The quarterback may NOT directly run with the ball. It must be first handed off or passed to another player.
- U9/U10, U11/U12, U13/U14, U15/U16: The quarterback has a <u>5-second</u> pass-clock to get rid of the ball.

PASS INTERFERENCE

Pass interference is when a defensive or offensive player is obstructed from catching a thrown ball. Pass interference is not assessed when both players are making a play for the ball and have inadvertent, incidental contact (as determined by the referee). If feet get tangled inadvertently while running a route, there is no illegal contact or interference. Ball catchability negates pass interference.



All players are eligible to receive passes (including the quarterback if the ball has been handed off or lateraled behind the line of scrimmage). When making a reception, the receiver must have at least one foot inbounds—with possession of the ball—BEFORE any part of the body touches down on or beyond the boundary line.

- In the case of simultaneous possession by both an offensive and defensive player, possession is awarded to the offense.
- Interceptions change the possession of the ball at the point of interception. Interceptions are the only
 changes of possession that do not begin on the start line. If a defensive player fails to return the ball to their
 start line, the ball is spotted at the start line. Interceptions are returnable, except on PATs.



Handoffs, pitches, and lateral passes are only permitted behind the line of scrimmage, or it is an <u>illegal lateral</u>. The offense may use multiple handoffs, pitches, and lateral passes on the same play. The offense may also use handoffs, pitches, and lateral passes subsequent to a forward pass, as long as the forward pass is caught behind the line of scrimmage. The player who takes a handoff, pitch, or lateral pass can throw a forward pass from behind the line of scrimmage.

• Once the ball has been thrown or handed off in front of or behind the quarterback, all defensive players are eligible to rush. In other words, once the ball leaves the quarterback's hand, any defensive player can then cross the line of scrimmage.

RUNNING WITH THE BALL

The ball is spotted where the ball *carrier's* <u>front foot</u> is when the flag is pulled, not where the ball carrier has the ball.

- The ball carrier may not create contact by lowering their head, shoulder, diving, jumping, or deliberately
 running into a defensive player. Jumping and spinning are allowed to avoid a defender, as long as it does
 not create forceable contact.
- No diving is permitted by the ball carrier. The ball will be spotted where the player's front foot was upon
 initiating the dive. If the diving player created contact with the dive, the <u>illegal contact</u> penalty will be
 enforced from the spot where the player's front foot was upon initiating the dive.

BLOCKING

Blocking is allowed by all players. Only <u>one</u> player is permitted to block a defender at any given time. The blocker must come to a complete stop "like a basketball pick" with hands straight down to the side, front, or back, to avoid contacting the defender. A penalty will be called if any player blocking is still moving or initiates contact, which includes hands out in front of them to block.

- Blockers cannot continuously run alongside the ball carrier (this would be considered a moving block); the blocker must stop at the first defender they encounter.
- Offensive players cannot create a "wall" when blocking. In other words, blockers must be spaced out by at least 2 yards.

NO-RUN ZONE

No handoffs, pitches or lateral passes are allowed. All forward passes (including shovel passes) **must be received BEYOND the line of scrimmage**. The quarterback CANNOT run with the ball, even if they are rushed.

- If the offense loses yards after crossing into the no-run zone and the ball is then spotted behind the no-run zone, they may run or pass on subsequent plays of the same drive.
- If a penalty occurs while in the no-run zone, causing the ball to be spotted behind the no-run zone, the no-run-zone rules still apply until the line-to-gain or end zone is reached.

UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT

- If the referee witnesses any acts of intentional tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, blocking, 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!** FOUL PLAY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.
- Offensive or confrontational language is illegal. Officials have the right to determine offensive language. If offensive or confrontational language occurs, the referee will give one warning. If it continues, the offending individuals (players or coaches) will be ejected from the game. Players may not physically or verbally abuse any opponent or official.
- Trick Plays and Unfair Acts. PAL Football does not allow plays of deception. Examples of deceptive plays include, but are not limited to, "hideout" plays such as "the globe of death" or "starburst" or "wrong ball" plays. Strategic plays that are considered commonplace such as shifting, unusual formations and play action are acceptable. Trick plays will result in an unsportsmanlike penalty.



On change of possession, the defense has 20 seconds to get into position, or a delay of game will be called.

- A disconcerting signals penalty occurs when the defense mimics the offensive team signals, in an effort to
 confuse the offensive players, while the quarterback is calling out signals to start the play.
- Defensive players cannot intentionally strip or pull the ball from the ball carrier's possession or try to cause a fumble, or they will receive an **illegal contact** penalty.
- Once the ball is handed off or passed, all defenders may cross the line of scrimmage.



A single player can rush the passer. Other defenders not rushing the quarterback may defend at the line of scrimmage. Teams are not required to rush the quarterback nor identify their rusher prior to the snap. A special marker will designate a "rush line" 10 yards from the line of scrimmage that the rusher must be behind before the snap. The rusher should verify he/she is in the correct position with the official on every play. If the rusher crosses the 10-yard rush line before the ball is snapped, they may return to the rush line, reset and then legally rush the quarterback as long as they are behind the rush line when the ball is snapped. If the rusher leaves the rush line early and the ball is handed off or passed before they cross the line of scrimmage, there is no penalty. If the rusher leaves the 10-yard rush line before the snap, he/she may immediately drop back to act as a defender with no penalty enforced.

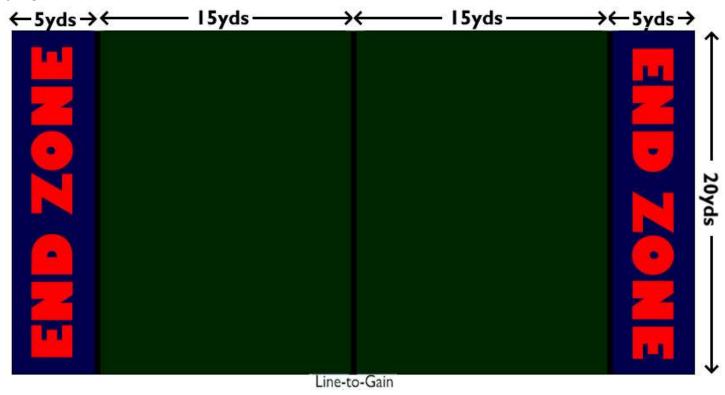
- An illegal rush occurs when (1) the rusher leaves the rush line before the snap and crosses the line of scrimmage before a handoff or pass or (2) any defensive player not lined up at the pass rush line crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is passed or handed off.
- The rusher may attempt to block a pass. However, it is <u>illegal contact</u> if any contact is made with the quarterback in any way when attempting to block a pass.
- The quarterback can run with the ball after the rusher crosses the line of scrimmage, except in the no-run zone. If the quarterback crosses the line of scrimmage before the rusher crosses, this is **illegal running**.
- A sack occurs if the quarterback's flags are pulled behind the line of scrimmage. The ball is placed where
 the quarterback's front foot is when the flag is pulled. A safety is awarded if the sack takes place in the
 offensive team's end zone.
- Any defensive player who crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped is <u>offisdes</u>.
- It is an offensive illegal contact if offensive players interfere with (impede in any way) the rusher.
- U4, U5/U6, U7/U8: No defensive player may rush until the ball leaves the quarterback's hands.

FAN BEHAVIOR

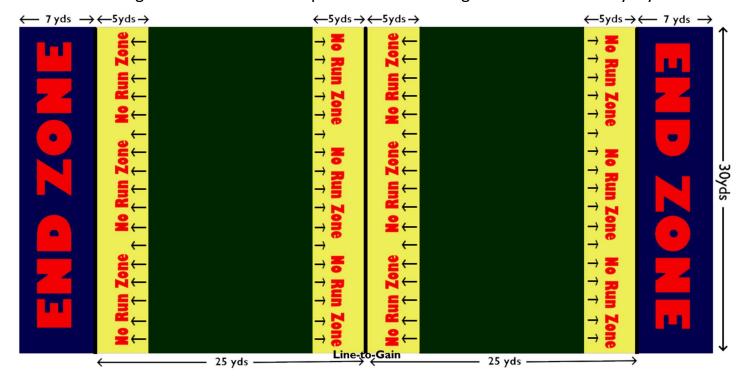
Fans must also adhere to good sportsmanship. They must yell to cheer on your players, not to harass officials or other teams; keep comments clean and profanity free; and compliment ALL players, not just one child or team. Fans are required to keep fields safe and kid friendly. Keep younger kids and equipment such as coolers, chairs, and tents at least 3 feet away from the sidelines. Fans are allowed on their team's designated sideline, but must leave adequate room for play and for coaches and teams. **No pets are allowed at the fields** (except certified service animals).



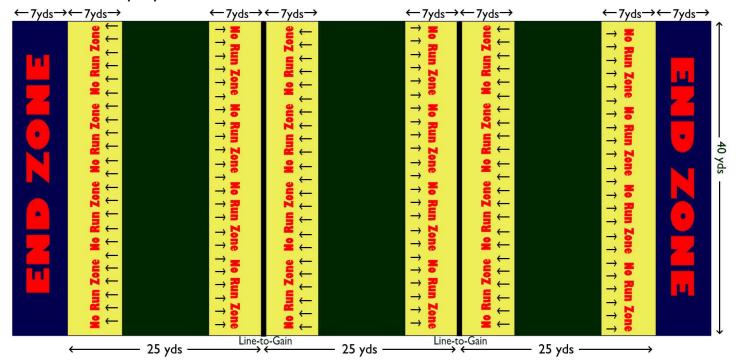
<u>4U, 5U/6U</u>: 20 yards wide by 40 yards long with two 5-yard end zones and a midfield line-to-gain. The "no-run zone" rules do not apply to these divisions. Players can run the ball at any time.



<u>7U/8U, 9U/10U, 11U/12U</u>: 30 yards wide by 64 yards long with two 7-yard end zones and a midfield line-to-gain. The no-run zones precede the line-to-gain and end zones by 5 yards.



<u>13U/14U</u>, <u>15U/16U</u>: 40 yards wide by 89 yards long, with two 7-yard end zones. There are two lines-to-gain located 25 yards from each end zone. The no-run zones precede each line-to-gain and end zone by 7 yards.



- No-run zones are in place to prevent teams from conducting power run plays. While in the no-run zones, teams cannot run the ball in any fashion, including plays that begin with laterals, pitches, or hand-offs.
- Stepping on the boundary line is considered out of bounds.
- Spectators must be a minimum of 3 feet from the sideline on the designated spectator side of the field only. **Pets are not allowed!**
- Only players and coaches (with valid badges) are allowed on the team side of the field. Officials will check badges before game play.

PLAYER ELIGIBILITY

Playing age is determined by the age the child will be as of August 31 of the calendar year in which the season is played. The league that the child qualifies for in the spring season would be the same for the fall season. **Birth certificates are required at registration**. *All players must present a liability waiver that is signed by a legal guardian or parent*.

- Example 1: If a child turns seven between January 1 and August 31, they would play in the league that includes U7.
- Example 2: If a child turns seven between September 1 and December 31, they would play in the league that includes U6.



Teams are limited to three (3) hours of practice per week, with a maximum of three (3) practices per week. *Teams will be allowed an extra hour per week only before the first game of the season*.