

NARBERTH FLAG FOOTBALL RULES

Updated 9/11/2025

A. Game Summary

1. Away team (light jersey) start with the football first. Each team fields 5 players with a minimum of 4 players at all times. Number of field players can change at the discretion of the league commissioners.
2. The offensive team takes possession of the ball at its 5-yard line and has four (4) downs to cross midfield. Once a team crosses midfield, it has three (3) downs to score a touchdown.
 - a. If the offensive team fails to cross midfield, on 3 downs, and elects to "punt" on 4th down, possession of the ball changes and the opposition starts its drive from its own 5-yard line. If the offensive team goes for it on 4th down and does not cross mid-field, the opposing team will start its possession from that spot.
 - b. Any time prior to spotting the ball, 'Ready for Play', the referee MUST ask the offensive team's coach to declare 'Punt or Play' in a 4th down situation. The coach MUST answer at that time or risk a delay of game penalty at the referees discretion.
 - c. Teams may use a timeout only to change the declaration of "Play" at any time prior to the expiration of the play clock.
 - d. If the declaration is "Punt" the ball changes possession and will be placed at the opposing team's 5-yard line, 1st down, with **NO** option to change the declaration.
 - e. If the offense fails to score, after crossing midfield the ball changes possession and the new offensive Team starts at its 5-yard line
 - f. Adjustment rule. If at any time during the second half a team is down by 25 points or more, when it is their turn to possess the ball at the far 5 yard line, they may elect to take the ball at midfield. In this instance they will have 4 downs to attempt to score.
3. Teams change sides after the first half. Possession changes to the team that started the game on defense.

B. Equipment

1. Official NFL Flag Jerseys and belts must be worn during play. Home team wears the dark side of the jersey.
2. Players' jerseys must be tucked into pants or shorts, so they do not interfere with the opponent's opportunity to pull the flag.
3. Flag belts must be worn as designed (sockets facing outward, one on each hip) and may not be altered in any fashion.
4. Football and soccer cleats are permitted, but not required.
5. Mouth guards are recommended.
6. Players must remove all jewelry, sunglasses, hard brimmed hats.
7. Player cannot wear sweatshirt under their jersey.
8. NFL Flag football official game balls will be provided by the referee. Blue used for 1st to 4th grades. Brown used for 5th to 8th grades.

C. Terminology

Boundary Lines	The outer perimeter lines around the field. They include the sidelines and back of the end zone lines.
Line of Scrimmage	(LOS) an imaginary line running through the point of the 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 seven yards (into the defensive side) from the line of scrimmage
Offense	The team with possession of the ball.
Defense	The team opposing the offense to prevent it from advancing the ball.
Passer	The offensive player that throws the ball and may or may not be the quarterback.
Rusher	The defensive player assigned to rush the quarterback to prevent him/ her from passing the ball by pulling his/her flags or by blocking the pass.
Live Ball	Refers to the period of time that the play is in action. Generally used in regard to penalties. Live ball penalties are considered part of the play and must be enforced before the down is considered complete.
Dead Ball	Refers to the period of time immediately before or after a play.
Whistle	Sound made by an official using a whistle that signifies the end of the play or a stop in the action for a timeout, halftime or the end of the game.
Inadvertent Whistle	Official's whistle that is performed in error.
Charging	An illegal movement of the ball-carrier directly at a defensive player who has established position on the field. This includes lowering the head or initiating contact with a shoulder, forearm or the chest.
Flag Guarding	An illegal act by the ball-carrier to prevent a defender from pulling the ball-carrier's flags by stiff arm, lowering elbow or head or by blocking access to the runner's flags with a hand, arm or ball.
Shovel Pass	A legal forward pass across the LOS underhand, backhand or by pushing the ball forward.

Lateral	A backward or sideways toss of the ball by the ball-carrier.
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D. Field

1. There are two recommended field dimensions -
 - a. approximately 25 yards wide by 70 yards with two 10-yard end zones
 - b. approximately 25 yards wide by 64 yards long with two seven-yard end zones.

Both with a midfield line to gain. No Run zones are located five yards prior to the line to gain and five yards prior to the end zone in the offense's direction.

2. No-run zones are in place to prevent teams from conducting power run plays. While in the no-run zones (a 5-yard imaginary zone before midfield and before the end zone), teams cannot run the ball in any fashion. All plays must be pass plays, even with a handoff.
3. Stepping on the boundary line is considered out of bounds.
4. Each offensive team 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).



E. Timing

1. Games are played on a 40-minute continuous clock with two 20-minute halves. In the last 2 minutes of the end of the game incomplete passes and running out of bounds stops the clock.
2. Halftime is 5 minutes.
3. Each time the ball is spotted by the referee, a team has 40 seconds to snap the ball.
4. Each team has two 60-second timeouts per half. They do not carry over.
5. Officials can stop the clock at their discretion and for injuries.

F. Scoring

1. **Touchdown:** 6 points
2. **PAT** (point after touchdown)
1 point (5-yard line pass only) or **2 points** (10-yard line pass only)
3. Interceptions returned for scores during regular game play are worth 6 points. Interceptions returned during a PAT attempt are worth 2 points.
4. **Safety:** 2 points
 - a. A safety occurs when the ball-carrier is declared down in their 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.
5. A team that scores a touchdown must declare whether it wishes to attempt a 1-point conversion (5-yard line) or a 2-point conversion (from the 10-yard line). A decision cannot be changed after a penalty.
6. The coaches and referee must verify the final score of the game. The referees will report the score to the league commissioner.

G. Coaches

1. Coaches are expected to adhere to Narberth Flag football philosophies, coaching guidelines and code of conduct.

2. Coaches, and players must remain a minimum of 5 yards off the field sideline for safety reasons.
3. Coaches on the field:
 - a. 1st to 5th - Only one coach is permitted to set up kids on the field before play and must leave the playing field before play begins. After the referee spots the ball teams must snap the ball within 30 seconds.
 - b. 6th to 8th - A coach may be on the field in a huddle however the 30 second time limit will be strictly enforced.
4. Players will have equal playing time and play in all positions. No steady quarterback.
5. Designated game head coach is the only one who can talk to an official regarding rule interpretation. If the rule is interpreted incorrectly, the timeout will not be charged and the proper ruling will be enforced. If the ruling is correct the team will be charged a timeout.
6. Any disputes on the field that the referees cannot handle will be decided by the field commissioners.
7. If a coach does not behave in a sportsmanlike manner they will be warned. 2nd warning they will receive a one game suspension. A third infraction will result in a suspension for the remainder of the season and not allowed to coach in NAA.
8. Practice is only allowed on game day at WVMS for 30 minutes before game time.

H. Live Ball/Dead Ball

1. The ball is live at the snap of the ball and remains live until the referee whistles the ball dead.
2. The referee will indicate the line of scrimmage.
3. A player who gains possession of the ball in the air is considered in bounds as long as the first foot or other body part contacts the ground in the field of play.
4. The defense may not mimic the offensive team signals by trying to confuse the offensive players, while the quarterback is calling out signals to start the play. This will result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty.
5. Substitutions may be made on any dead ball.
6. Any referee can whistle the play dead.
7. Play is ruled "dead" when:

- a. The ball hits the ground.
- b. The ball-carrier's flag is pulled.
- c. The ball-carrier steps out of bounds.
- d. A touchdown, PAT or safety is scored.
- e. The ball-carrier's knee or arm hits the ground.
- f. The ball-carrier's flag falls out.
- g. The receiver catches the ball while in possession of one or no flag(s).
- h. The '5 Mississippi' count expires.
- i. Inadvertent whistle
- j. Ball-carriers leave their feet diving or to hurdle a player other than jump cuts, spinning or to avoid a downed player on the field of play.

NOTE: Fumbles/loss of possession: Ground contact must be made for the play to be dead at that spot. A fumble is loss of possession by players, resulting in the ball contacting the ground.

- 8. If inadvertent whistle occurs the offense has two options:
 - A) Take the ball where the whistle blew and the down is consumed
 - B) Replay the down from the original line of scrimmage. If it occurs on the last play of the half or game, the offense will be awarded one untimed down and given those two options.

I. Running

- 1. The ball is spotted where the ball is when the flag is pulled.
- 2. The quarterback cannot directly run with the ball until he is rushed by the defense. The quarterback is the offensive player who receives the snap.
- 3. The offense may use multiple handoffs.
 - a. "Center sneak" play is NOT allowed. The QB may NOT handoff, pitch or lateral the ball first to the center.
 - b. Any player who receives a handoff, backward pass, pitch or lateral can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage.
 - c. Once the ball has been handed off, in front, behind or to the side of the quarterback, the '5 Mississippi' count is eliminated and all defensive players are eligible to rush.
- 4. Pitches or laterals are permitted.
- 5. No-run Zones are located 5 yards before each end zone and 5 yards on either side of midfield are designed to avoid short-yardage power-running situations. Teams are not allowed to run in these zones if the subsequent line is LIVE. (Reminder: Each offensive team

approaches only TWO no-run zones in each drive – one 5 yards from midfield to gain the first down and one 5 yards from the goal line to score a TD).

6. Runners may not leave their feet to advance the ball; Diving, leaping/ hurdling or jumping to avoid a flag pull is considered flag guarding. The play is blown dead and ball spotted where it was when they left the ground.
7. Spinning/Jump Cuts are allowed, but players cannot leave their feet to avoid a flag pull.
 - a. Players spinning out of control will be called for flag guarding.
8. Ball carriers may leave their feet and the play will continue for spinning, jump cuts, QB's passing progression or if there is a clear indication that he/she has done so to avoid a collision with another player and the play will continue without stoppage.
9. No blocking or "screening" is allowed at any time.
10. Offensive players in close proximity to the ball-carrier must stop their motion once the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage. No running with the ball-carrier.
11. Flag obstruction – All jerseys MUST be tucked in before play begins. The flags must be on the player's hips and free from obstruction. Deliberately obstructed flags will be considered flag guarding. No sweatshirts may be worn under a player's jersey.
12. Any player who receives a handoff can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage.
13. Once the ball has been handed off in front, behind or to the side of the quarterback, all defensive players are eligible to rush.

J. Passing

1. All passes must be thrown from behind the line of scrimmage, thrown forward and ball out of hand prior to breaching the line of scrimmage.
 - a. There is no intentional grounding
 - b. All passes that do not cross the line of scrimmage, whether received or not, are illegal forward passes, unless touched by a defender.
 - c. The quarterback may throw the ball away to avoid a sack. Pass must go beyond the line of scrimmage.
2. Shovel passes are allowed.
3. The quarterback has a '5 Mississippi' pass count. If a pass is not thrown within the pass count 7 count, the play is dead, the down is consumed and the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage.

Once the ball is handed off, the '5 Mississippi' count rule is no longer in effect.

- a. If the QB is standing in the end zone at the end of the '5 Mississippi' pass count, the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage (LOS).
- b. If the quarterback throws the ball and then catches it, the play is dead and treated like an incomplete pass.

K. Receiving

1. All players are eligible to receive passes (including the QB if the ball has been handed off behind the line of scrimmage).
2. Only one player is allowed in motion at a time. Player MUST be off the LOS at least one (1) yard. All motion must be parallel to the LOS and no motion is permitted toward the line of scrimmage.
3. A player must have at least one foot or other body part in bounds, contacting the ground first with possession.
4. In the case of simultaneous possession by both an offensive and defensive player, possession is awarded to the offense.
5. Interceptions are returnable. If returned for a score during regular game play, the score will be worth six points, two points if returned during conversions and/or overtime.

L. Defense & Rushing the Passer

1. All players who rush the passer must wait until the referee reaches a count of '5 Mississippi' before rushing the passer unless the ball has been handed off. In this case players can immediately rush the ball carrier. Any number of players can rush the quarterback. Players not rushing the quarterback can defend on the line of scrimmage.
2. Once the ball is handed off, the count of '5 Mississippi' is no longer in effect and all defenders may go behind the line of scrimmage.
 - a. A legal rush is:
 - i. Any rush from a point 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 line of scrimmage before the snap and crosses the line of scrimmage before a handoff or pass – illegal rush (5-yards from the line of scrimmage and first down).
 - ii. Any defensive player crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped – offsides (5-yards from line of scrimmage and first down).
 - 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 and first down).
 - iv. If the offense draws the rusher(s) to jump the line of scrimmage prior to the snap of the ball, that rusher(s) CANNOT rush during that play. However, any other defender may rush instead. Jumping the rush is not a penalty until the rusher crosses the line of scrimmage prior to the handoff or passed ball.
 - v. Teams are not required to rush the QB with the '5 Mississippi' count in effect.
 - vi. Teams are not required to identify their rusher before the play.
3. Players rushing the QB 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.

4. The offense cannot impede the rusher in any way. The rusher has the right to a clear path to the QB, regardless of where they line up prior to the snap.

The PATH is set pre-snap from the rusher or rushers directly to the QB. PATH does not move once the QB 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 to avoid contact.

5. A sack occurs if the quarterback's flags are pulled behind the line of scrimmage. The ball will be spotted where possession of the ball is once the flag is pulled.
 - a. A Safety is awarded if the sack takes place in the offensive team's end zone.

M. 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.
6. A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off of a player who is not in possession of 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, ball, arm or shoulder or intentionally covering the flags with the football jersey.

N. Formations

1. Offenses must have a minimum of one player on the line of scrimmage (the center) and up to 4 players on the line of scrimmage. The QB must be off the line of scrimmage.
 - a. Teams may shift formations prior to the snap as long as they are set for at least 1 second before the ball is snapped.
 - b. One player at a time may go in motion at least 1 yard behind the line of scrimmage.
2. Movement by a player who is set or a player who runs toward the line of scrimmage while in motion is considered a false start.
3. The center must snap the ball to a player in the backfield, and the ball must completely leave his/her hands. You do not have to hike the ball through the legs but can if desired.

O. Unsportsmanlike Conduct

1. If referees witness any acts of intentional tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, blocking or any unsportsmanlike act, the game will be stopped & the player will be ejected from the game. The decision is made at the referee's discretion. No appeals will be considered.
2. Offensive or confrontational language is **NOT** allowed. If offensive or confrontational language occurs, the referees will determine if a warning or immediate ejection is warranted.
3. Players may not physically or verbally abuse any opponent, coach or official.
4. Ball-carriers **MUST** make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position.
5. Unsportsmanlike conduct penalties: are these listed on penalty
 - a. Defense + 10 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
 - b. Offense - 10 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
6. Fans must adhere to good sportsmanship as well:
 - a. Cheer on all players, not just one child or team
 - b. Do not yell or harass referees, coaches, fans or players.
 - c. Fans must sit or stay a minimum of 10 yards off the field.
 - d. No dogs allowed at fields

- e. Dispose of all trash, do not leave it at the field

P. Penalties

General

1. The referees will call all penalties.
2. Referees determine incidental contact that may result from normal run of play.
3. All penalties will be assessed from the line of scrimmage, except as noted. (Spot fouls)
4. Games or halves may not end on a defensive penalty unless the offense declines it.
5. Penalties are assessed live ball then dead ball. Live ball penalties must be assessed before play is considered complete.
6. Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal yardage when the penalty yardage is more than half the distance to the goal.
7. Spot fouls in end zone: Defensive (Ball on one-yard line, first down)/Offensive (Safety)

Defensive spot fouls

Defensive pass interference	Automatic first down
Holding/Illegal contact	+5 yards and automatic first down
Stripping	+5 yards and automatic first down

Offensive spot fouls

Screening, blocking or running with the ball	-5 yards and loss of down
Charging	-5 yards and loss of down
Flag guarding	-5 yards and loss of down

Defensive penalties

Defensive unnecessary roughness	+10 yards and automatic first down
Defensive unsportsmanlike conduct	+10 yards and automatic first down
Offside /illegal sub	+5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Illegal rush (Starting rush from inside 7-yard marker)	+5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Illegal flag pull (Before the receiver has the ball)	+5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Roughing the passer	+5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Taunting	+5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down

OFFENSIVE PENALTIES

Offensive unnecessary roughness	-10 yards and loss of down
Offensive unsportsmanlike conduct	-10 yards and loss of down
Offside / false start /illegal sub	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Illegal forward pass (Any pass received or lands behind the line of scrimmage or throwing a pass after crossing the line of scrimmage)	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Offensive pass interference	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Illegal motion (More than one person moving)	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Delay of game	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Impeding the rusher	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Illegal Procedure	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Taunting	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down