

MARIN MIDDLE SCHOOL ATHLETIC LEAGUE

Boys' Flag Football Rules & Expectations

What Middle School Flag Football Is All About

The purpose of middle school athletics is to provide a fun, safe, positive, and educational experience that promotes skill development, personal growth, and healthy competition. Through participation, student-athletes develop confidence, character, discipline, teamwork, and respect for others while learning the values of sportsmanship, responsibility, and perseverance. Middle school athletics are designed to foster a lifelong appreciation for physical activity and encourage every participant to reach their full potential in a supportive and inclusive environment.

AT A GLANCE

Format	8 vs. 8
Half Length	Two 20-minute halves (running clock)
Halftime	5 minutes
Timeouts	1 per team per half — no carryover (60 seconds each)
Overtime	Alternating possessions from the 20-yard line
Start Time	4:00 PM for first games unless arranged otherwise
Minimum Players	Teams must start with 8 players. A team may continue with no fewer than 6 players if players are injured or disqualified.
Field Size	100 yards total — 80-yard playing area + two 10-yard end zones, 40 yards wide. Field Dimension Visual
Flags	Each team will wear two (2) flags around their waist-one on each hip

How Flag Works

This is flag football — there's no tackling. Instead of bringing a player down, defenders pull a flag from the ball carrier's belt to end the play. It is a non-contact version of football.

- NFHS Rules: Games are played under current NFHS Flag Football Rules unless modified by league rules.
- Each player wears two flags secured at the waist — one on each hip.
- Shirts must be tucked under the flag belt so flags are always visible and accessible.
- All players, except interior line players, must be wearing flags before the ball becomes live.
- Players may not wear anything making it difficult for the defense to grab flags. No wrapping flags around the belt.
- The ball carrier is down the moment a flag is legally pulled.

- Diving, hurdling, or initiating contact by the ball carrier is prohibited.
- Ball carriers may not use their hands or arms to block or prevent a flag pull (flag guarding) — this is a 5-yard spot foul.
 - Flag guarding is **not permitted**.
 - The ball carrier must keep both flags exposed and accessible at all times. It is illegal to intentionally protect the flag belt by:
 - Placing a hand, arm, elbow, or the ball over or near the flags.
 - Stiff-arming or extending an arm toward a defender.
 - Lowering a shoulder or turning the body to shield the flags.
 - Spinning, twisting, or using any movement with the intent to prevent a defender from accessing the flag.
 - Holding, securing, or covering the flag belt in any way.

A ball carrier may naturally run, cut, or spin as part of normal play, but these movements may not be used to intentionally shield or protect the flag belt from a defender.

Defenders may not strip or punch the ball out of a runner's hands.

The Clock

The clock runs continuously for most of the game. Here's when it stops:

- During timeouts
- When a player is injured
- At the referee's discretion
- In the final 2 minutes of each half — the clock stops for standard rules (incomplete passes, balls going out of bounds, and changes of possession)
- BEFORE START OF GAME
 1. Teams will line up before games for equipment check by referees.
 2. Team captains shall come to the middle of the field for a coin toss. The visitors shall have the first choice of the coin toss.
 3. The winner of the toss shall choose: 1) kickoff, 2) receive, 3) choose the side of the field they wish to defend, or 4) defer choice to 2nd half.

Scoring

Score Type	Points
Touchdown	6 points
Extra point (from 3-yard line)	1 point
Extra point (from 10-yard line)	2 points
Safety (defense stops offense in own end zone)	2 points

First downs:

- The field is divided into zones. A first down is earned when the offense reaches the next zone marker (at the 20, 40, and 20-yard lines).
- The offense gets 4 downs to reach the next zone marker or score a touchdown.

Note on extra points:

- If the defense intercepts or returns an extra point attempt, it is a dead ball — no defensive score on PATs.
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Running & Passing

- The quarterback can run the ball at any time (the former rule of “once per set of downs” was removed). They are free to run past the line of scrimmage, but only if they scramble outside the tackle box. Immediate “downhill” QB Sneaks up the center A-gap are completely illegal.
 - 7 Second Rule: There is no longer a time limit for the QB to throw the ball.(the former 7-second rule has been removed).
 - Only one forward pass may be thrown per down.
 - Handoffs, pitches, and laterals behind the line of scrimmage are all permitted.
 - If the ball is fumbled or dropped, the play is immediately dead at the spot it hits the ground — the defense cannot advance a fumble.
 - Eligible Receivers: There are 5 players that are eligible to receive a pass-QB, wide receivers, running backs and/or tight ends. The three (3) guards are ineligible to receive a pass and must be in 3-point stance..
 - Interior line players are ineligible to receive a pass. If they receive a pass or fumble, it will be ruled incomplete.
 - Only the last player on either end of the line of scrimmage and the backfield players are eligible to receive a pass.
 - No stiff arming, hurdling, jumping, spinning, or sliding.
 - A receiver may not use their hands or arms to move a defender to make a reception.
 - The Rusher must avoid hitting the Quarterback’s arm, even on the follow through motion.
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Snap & Formations

- The offense must have at least 3 players on the line of scrimmage (LOS), including the snapper and two (2) guards. They do not have to be right next to the center.
 - Center cannot be hit until he initiates contact with a defensive player.
 - The quarterback may take the snap under center or from the shotgun (at least 2 yards behind the LOS).
 - If the ball is hiked or dropped in the end zone, it will be ruled a safety.
 - Teams have no more than 5 players on the line of scrimmage at the snap. All other players must line up behind the LOS.
 - Only one player off the line of scrimmage is allowed to be moving laterally/backwards at the snap of the ball. All other offensive players must hold still prior to the snap. Illegal motion, false starts, and other procedure violations will be enforced.
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Field & Possessions

- There will be a kick off at the beginning of the game and after every score.

- Four downs are provided to reach the next first down marker or score
 - Once a team reaches the first down marker they receive a new set of downs.
 - Dead Ball: If the ball is fumbled or dropped, the play is immediately blown dead at the spot where the ball hits the ground.
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Punting

- A coach must declare the intent to punt before the play — there are no "live" surprise punts.
 - All players must freeze until the ball is kicked.
 - The receiving team may recover a grounded kick, but the kicking team may not.
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Defense

- Any defender may rush the quarterback from the neutral zone (the 1-yard buffer zone at the line of scrimmage). The former "7 yard start" rule was removed in 2025.
 - A maximum of 2 defenders may rush the quarterback on any given play. They must line up shaded to the outside of the offensive guards.
 - Interceptions may be returned unless modified by league rules.
 - Defensive pass interference and illegal contact will be enforced. Receivers are allowed free release from the line of scrimmage. No bump and run coverage.
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Blocking & Contact

Flag football is a non-contact sport. Blocking is permitted.

- Players may block the opposing team with open hands if the initial contact is made with their hands close to the body or with their arms fully extended. A clenched fist is not allowed.
- No moving into or initiating contact with a defender — "contact with impact" is a foul.
- Players cannot lower their head or leave their feet while blocking. No cross body blocking permitted.
- Tackling, pushing, holding, charging, and unnecessary roughness are all prohibited.
- Offensive players cannot block downfield once the ball travels more than 10 yards past the line of scrimmage (LOS).

A blocker may:

- Establish a legal position.
- Stand between a defender and the ball carrier.
- Move laterally or backward while maintaining position.
- Keep arms close to the body.

A blocker may **not**:

- Push or shove.
- Initiate contact.
- Extend the arms or elbows
- Block in the back (clipping)..

- Use hands to steer a defender.
- Knock a defender off their path.

Overtime

If the game is tied at the end of regulation, here's how overtime works:

- A coin toss determines which team goes on offense or defense first.
- Each team starts a possession from the 20-yard line and has one series of downs to score — the goal line is always the line to gain.
- Teams alternate possessions each overtime period.
- Each team gets 1 timeout per overtime period.
- If still tied after the 2nd overtime, each team must attempt a 2-point conversion after scoring.

Penalty Quick Reference

Here's a summary of the most common penalties. All offensive penalties result in a loss of down. All defensive penalties result in an automatic first down.

Offensive Penalties — All Offensive Penalties Result in a Loss of Down

Foul	Penalty
Offsides / False Start / Procedure	5 yards from LOS
Illegal Forward Pass	5 yards from LOS
Pass Interference (offense)	5 yards from LOS
Illegal Motion / Illegal Substitution	5 yards from LOS
Delay of Game	5 yards from LOS
Impeding the Rusher / Illegal Contact	5 yards from LOS
Screening / Blocking	Spot foul + 5 yards
Charging	Spot foul + 5 yards
Flag Guarding	Spot foul + 5 yards
Holding / Illegal Contact	Spot foul + 5 yards
Taunting	10 yards from LOS
Unsportsmanlike / Unnecessary Roughness	10 yards & Loss of Down

Defensive Penalties — All Defensive Penalties Result in an Automatic 1st Down

Foul	Penalty
Offsides	5 yards from LOS
Illegal Rush	5 yards from LOS

Illegal Flag Pull	5 yards from LOS
Illegal Substitution	5 yards from LOS
Roughing the Passer	5 yards from LOS
Pass Interference (defense)	Spot foul (ball placed at point of foul; 1-yard line if in end zone)
Holding / Illegal Contact	Spot foul + 5 yards
Stripping	Spot foul + 5 yards
Taunting	10 yards from LOS
Unsportsmanlike / Unnecessary Roughness	10 yards from LOS

Mercy Rule

If a team leads by 28 or more points in the second half, the clock runs continuously. If the deficit drops below 28 points, normal clock rules resume.

Coaches are expected to prioritize sportsmanship and player development — intentionally running up the score is not in the spirit of the league.

Officials & Scorekeeping

- The goal is to have 2 officials per game. (These officials must be at least a high school student or older and must have some officiating experience)
- Referee decisions are final.
- Coaches may politely ask for rule clarification — they may not argue judgment calls.
- The home school must provide an official scorekeeper and timekeeper at all games and must sit at the scorer's table.

Ejections & Conduct

If a player, coach, or spectator is ejected from a game:

- The home team reports the incident including the name and role of the person to the league commissioner within 24 hours
- The ejected person may not attend or participate in the next league contest

Safety Rules for Everyone

- Players must wear proper flag football attire and athletic shoes.
- Mouthguards are required.
- Jewelry is not permitted during games
- Players may wear gloves, elbow pads, and knee pads. Braces with exposed metal are not allowed.

- Any athlete showing signs of injury, illness, heat-related concerns, or concussion symptoms will be removed from competition and evaluated according to school and league protocols.
- No spectator may enter the field unless a player is injured and they are a parent or trained medical professional.
- All photographers, team managers, coaches not on the sideline, and fans must remain in the designated league viewing area — off the field.

Hot Weather Policy

90–100°F:

- Each half is 25 minutes with a 5 minute hydration break at the midpoint
- Halftime is extended to 10 minutes

100°F and above:

- Games should be rescheduled
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Uniforms & Equipment

- Football size: teams may use a size 6 or size 7 ball. Size 7 is recommended.
 - Each player wears two league-approved flags, one on each hip, properly secured at the waist.
 - Interior line players do not wear flags. They are ineligible to receive a pass. If they receive a pass or fumble, it will be ruled incomplete.
 - Players may not wear anything making it difficult for the defense to grab flags. No wrapping flags around the belt.
 - The home team and visiting team shall wear jerseys.
 - Jersey numbers shall meet rulebook requirements. If the school has no approved jerseys they may, by consent of the league prior to the season, use their current jerseys.
 - If both teams have similarly colored jerseys, it shall be the responsibility of the home team to change jerseys.
 - No two players on the same team in any one game shall have the same number.
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Sportsmanship

Coaches, players, and spectators are all expected to demonstrate good sportsmanship at all times. This includes:

- Respect for officials, opponents, teammates, and facility staff
 - Unsportsmanlike behavior may result in technical fouls, ejection, or additional disciplinary action.
 - Coaches are responsible for the behavior of their players and their team's spectators
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League Champions

- League Champions will be determined by the winner of the Championship Game held at the conclusion of the season.
 - Championship banners will be awarded to League Champions in each division.
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Fun • Safety • Skill Development • Confidence • Character • Teamwork • Sportsmanship