



FALL 2025 FLAG FOOTBALL RULES

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I. NOTICE

- a. The Vice-president of Football and/or Assistant VP of Football, with the approval of the Board of Directors, reserves the right to waive, interpret or amend any rule when such waiver or amendment is deemed to be in the best interest of the program. Waiver in individual instances may be made with the intent to allow each child, who expresses a desire to play, the opportunity to do so.
- b. Any head coach or assistant coach found in violation of the rules within in Arlington Community Athletics Optimist Club rule book or the Coach's Application shall be required to appear before the Football Committee, Vice-President of Football and/or the Board of Directors for review prior to the coach participating in any football activities.
- c. The Vice-President of Football and/or assistant VP of Football will determine what, if any, disciplinary action needs to be taken. This action may be anything up to and including dismissal from his/her position within the program.
- d. All causes and actions must be presented to Vice-President of Football and/or assistant VP of Football for review and approval.
- e. Referees will have the option to stop any game if coach/parent/player violations are continuously committed. The opposing team will automatically receive the win regardless of the score at the time the game is stopped.

II. COACHES' RESPONSIBILITY

- a. The head coach of a team is responsible to affirm that he and all his assistant coaches are members in good standing of the ACAO, current in their payment of their dues, has submitted a completed coach's application prior to the start of practice. All applicants will abide by the rules, policies, regulations, guidelines, and the intentions thereof, as set forth by the Arlington Community Athletics Optimist Club.
- b. Applications and agreements are for the current year's season only. They must be submitted each year and must be approved each year, prior to the start of practice, by the Board of Directors.
- c. The head coach is responsible for the conduct of all assistant coaches and the team. Any head coach will immediately remove any assistant coach objectionable to the Football Committee, or the Board of Directors.
- d. Each coach must actively support and encourage player participation during any fundraising campaign that may be conducted for this program.
- e. It shall be mandatory that each head coach meet with the parents of the team players before practices are to begin. The purpose of this meeting will be to explain the football program, promote sportsmanship, and to define what is expected of each player.
- f. The head coach of each team must restrain all fans from any display of conduct that is deemed not appropriate or does not display proper sportsmanship. This includes but is not limited to" jeering at any player, field official or an Optimist member who has been assigned to work the field. It is not considered appropriate for fans to be closer than 5 yards from the playing field. Fans must not walk or stand in the area in front of the bleachers (this is reserved for the cheerleaders). If fans insist to display unsportsmanlike conduct, the game may be stopped, and it will be the coaches' responsibility to talk to the fans.

- g. Each head coach must ensure that the required adults to operate the down and distance markers, monitor games and keep score are provided. All must be in place prior to the start of the game in order to prevent a delay of game penalty.
- h. Each head coach must ensure that all issued equipment is returned to the Arlington Community Athletics Optimist Club. All decals and stickers must be removed by the teams that place them on the equipment.
- i. Each coach must ensure that every player on the team be given equal opportunity to participate in each game as required in Section III, Subheading b, Number ii.
- j. **Flag Football is a game of skill, both offensively and defensively. Rough tactics are not acceptable and are not intended to be part of the game of Flag Football. Players who initiate rough physical contact or coaches who promote such activities from their players will be penalized accordingly.**
- k. Any coach ejected from a game must appear before the Vice-president of Football prior to ANY further coaching activities.
- l. No coach, athlete or Optimist Official will use tobacco of any kind, nor will they use or be under the influence of any intoxicant, while in the presence of youths who are participating in our programs. This includes practice areas, game fields, and meeting sessions.
- m. Coaches and athletes must conduct themselves in a manner that reflects the high standards set forth by the Arlington Community Athletics Optimist Club. Misconduct, including but not limited to, profane or abusive language, gestures, etc., shall result in the immediate ejection and removal from the playing fields. Such ejection and removal may only be conducted by a member of the Football Committee.
- n. Any coach or athlete that does not follow these rules will be subject to dismissal from this program. A dismissed coach must appear before the Board of Directors and be reinstated by the Board of Directors. A dismissed coach may not participate in any football activity until reinstated.

III. General Rules, Divisions, Players and Equipment

a. General Rules

- i. **The Game** – The game shall be played between two teams of seven players each. Six players are required to start the game and avoid a forfeit – Once the game begins teams will be allowed to finish the game even if an injury causes them to not be able to field the minimum number of players.
 - 1. **Exception: 5U and under will be played as 5 on 5. Four (4) players are required to play the game.**
- ii. **Eligibility** - All players must be on the official roster registered with ACAO.
- iii. **Referee's Authority** - The Referee has authority to rule promptly, and in the spirit of good sportsmanship, on any situation not specifically covered in the rules. **The Referee's decisions are final in all matters pertaining to the game.**

- b. **Field** – The game will be played on a field with a minimum of 40 yards in width, 50 yards in length, and will be marked by 10 yard increments. The playing field will have at least one (1) end zone of 10 yards. If only one end zone, direction of play by the Offensive team will be towards the single end zone.
- i. **Each team will designate at least two parents** (total of 4) to help manage the game.
 - a. **Home Team** – help manage the scoreboard and clock. (if needed)
 - b. **Visiting Team** - Manage the line of scrimmage marker and the first down chains. (if needed)
- c. **Divisions/Football Sizes/Roster Sizes** – Below are the main divisions for ACAO, however, Divisions or players may be combined based on enrollment at each age and/or skill level.
- i. **Age Determination:** determined by the players age as of August 1st of that calendar year – EXEPTION can be made if born after Jan 1st of that year, and in the same grade as age group. Must prove with school transcript or report card. Exceptions shall be approved by the Football Committee.

Age Level	Divisions	Ball Size	Max Roster Size	Game Length	Postseason
5U	Rec.	Pee Wee	10	40 min	No
7U	Rec./Competitive	Pee Wee	14	40 min	Yes
9U	Rec./Competitive	Junior	14	40 min	Yes
11U	Rec./Competitive	Junior	14	40 min	Yes
13U	Rec./Competitive	Official	14	40 min	Yes

ii. **Playing Time**

1. 5U thru 7U – Each player will be required to play 50% of the time on either offense or defense.
2. 9u - Each player will be required to participate in at least 2 full series of plays on either offense or defense.
3. 11U-13U – No minimum playing time required.

- iii. **Rainouts** - In the case of rainouts, the commissioner will reschedule the game with a minimum of 2 days' notice. There is no rainout hotline number. All teams are expected to show up at their game, rain or shine. E-mails/Text notifications will be sent out if the fields are closed in advance.

d. Equipment

- i. **Jersey's** – each player will wear League Provided Jersey. Team may provide their own jersey but must be approved by commissioner prior to start of season. All jerseys MUST remain tucked in at all times. Players found not having their jersey tucked in will be taken out of the game for one play and may return once uniform is corrected. NO Player will be allowed to participate without a league approved jersey.
 1. In the event of similar jerseys between teams the Visiting team will be required to wear league provided Pennies to differentiate teams.
- ii. **Flag Belt** – each player will wear a one-piece belt at the waistline with two flags, one on each hip. This will be provided by the league, **NO FLAGS OTHER THAN LEAGUE PROVIDED FLAGS WILL BE PERMITTED.**
- iii. **Mouthpiece** – each player will be required to wear a mouthpiece. Players found not wearing a mouthpiece will be taken out of the game for one play and may not return until a mouthpiece has been acquired. Failure to wear a mouthpiece (after an official warning) is also a five (5) yard illegal procedure penalty.
- iv. **Headgear** – Soft Padded Headgear is recommended, but not required. No headgear containing any hard, unyielding, or stiff material will be permitted. Any headgear must be league approved prior to game use by the commissioner.
- v. **Exclusions** - No Jewelry of any kind will be permitted. Shoes with metal, ceramic, screw-in, or detachable cleats are NOT Permitted. Any team found wearing illegal equipment will be penalized 15 yards, and the second warning results in a forfeit.

d. Score Keeping/Records/Playoffs

- i. **5U** - Scores will be kept during the game, however once the score exceeds a 20pt margin. The score shall not change unless that margin is reduced by the team that is behind. No league records will be kept, **and no post season play.**
- ii. **7U thru 11U** – Scores will be recorded as they are determined during the game. League Standings will be kept, and there will be a post season tournament for each league/division.
- iii. Mercy Rule- **7U thru 13U**- Once the score exceeds a 48-pt margin. The scoreboard shall not change unless that margin is reduced by the team that is behind. (Score will be kept by the official for record keeping)
- iv. **Playoff Seeding**
 1. In the event that teams are tied for playoff position(s) at the completion of regular season play, the playoff position(s) will be determined using the following:
 - a. Head-to-head matchup
 - b. Total Points Allowed
 - c. Total Points Scored

IV. DEFINITIONS

1. **Catch** - A catch is an act of establishing player possession of a live ball in flight. One foot in-bounds.
2. **Encroachment** - Encroachment is a term to indicate a defensive player is illegally in the neutral zone. An entering substitute is not considered to be a player for encroachment restrictions until he/she is on his/her team's side of the neutral zone.
3. **Fair Catch** – A signal made by receiving person of a punt in which the receiver cannot run after catching the ball and the ball is immediately down when caught.
4. **Foul** – A foul is a rule infraction for which a penalty is assessed.
5. **Goal Line** – Each goal line is a vertical plane separating the end zone from the field of play. The plane of goal extends beyond the sideline.
6. **Hurdling** - Hurdling is an attempt by a player to jump with one or both feet or knees foremost over a player who is on his/her feet.
7. **Interception** - A catch of an opponent's pass or fumble in flight is an interception.
8. **Live Ball** - A pass or fumble, which has not yet touched the ground, is a live ball in flight and therefore can be caught and advanced by either team.
9. **Neutral Zone** - The neutral zone is the area between the offensive and defensive line of scrimmage that has been established by the spot cone markers and extends to each sideline. It is established when the ball is ready for play.
10. **Pass (Forward and Backward)** - A forward pass is a pass thrown with its initial direction toward the opponent's end line. A backward pass is a pass thrown with its initial direction parallel with or toward the passer's end line. A pass continues to be pass until it is caught or strikes the ground. A backward pass that hits the ground will be dead at the spot it strikes the ground.
11. **Penalty** – A penalty is a loss imposed by rule upon a team that has committed a foul.
12. **Protective Scrimmage Kick** – A punt in which prohibits either team from advancing beyond their scrimmage lines until the ball is kicked.
13. **Punting** - A punt is kicking the ball by a player who drops it and kicks it before it hits the ground.
14. **Screen Blocking** - Screen Blocking is legally obstructing an opponent without initiating contact with him/her with any part of the screen blocker's body.
15. **Offensive/Defensive Contact**- A blocking or charging situation occurs when contact is made between an offensive player (running with the ball or attempting to change direction) and a defensive player. The defender is permitted to establish a legal defensive position in the path of the ball carrier, regardless of speed or distance. To be in a legal position, the defender must establish himself in the runner's path before contact is made, thus "beating the runner to the spot," and before the ball carrier initiates a flag-guarding motion or makes a move that leads to illegal contact.
16. **Tagging** - Tagging is placing one hand anywhere between the shoulders and knees of an opponent with the ball. The tagger may leave his/her feet to make the tag. Pushing, striking, slapping, and holding are not permitted. If a player trips the runner in his/her attempt to make a diving flag pull, it is a penalty.

17. **Illegal Pick** – a receiver without the football obstructing a defender in coverage on a different receiver running a route. 2yds from line of scrimmage.

18. **Tripping** – Tripping is the use of the lower leg or foot to obstruct an opponent, including the runner, below the knee.

19.

V. Pre-Game

a. **Coin Toss** – Each team will select a “Team Captain or Captains” Three minutes before the start of the game the Referee shall instruct the visiting team captain to give a “heads” or “tails” choice before the coin toss. The referee then will toss the coin allowing it to hit the ground.

i. The captain winning the toss shall have the choice in the first half of:

1. Offense/Defense/Defer Choice to Second Half

2. Or Goal to Defend

3. Whichever team chooses, the other team chooses the remaining option.

4. The game shall start from 40-yard line.

b. **Clock**

i. **5U will play 12 min halves of continuous clock with 1 coaches time out per half.**

Halftime will be 5 minutes.

ii. **7U thru 13U will play 20 min halves of continuous clock with 3-time outs per half.**

Halftime will be 5 minutes.

iii. Clock stoppage can occur for the following:

iv. Team time-out (clock resumes on snap of next play)

v. Referee's time-out (clock resumes on official's ready to play whistle)

vi. 2–Minute Warning (2nd half only) - Approximately 2 minutes before the end of the 2nd half the Referee shall stop the clock.

vii. **During the last two minutes of games for 7U-13U the clock will also stop on change of possession. (turnover on downs, interception, or a score).**

viii. **Clock will stop after a delay of game penalty and will continue running after the next snap.**

c. **Tie Game (Overtime)** - In case of a PLAYOFF game ending in a tie score, (regular season will not exceed 1-Overtime, a 2nd overtime will result in a tie.) the officials must bring all players and coaches of both teams to the center of the field. They will discuss the tiebreaker procedures and answer all questions prior to the coin toss. After this meeting the field captains will stay while the remaining players and coaches return to their respective sidelines.

d.

i. A coin will be flipped “heads” or “tails” choice by the visiting captain will determine the options as in the start of the game. The winner of the toss shall be given the option of offense or defense. Each overtime period begins with a coin toss.

ii. ALL OVERTIME PERIODS ARE PLAYED TOWARD THE SAME GOAL LINE.

- iii. Unless moved by penalty, each team will start 1st and goal with the ball spotted 10 yards from the goal line. The object will be to score a touchdown. An overtime period consists of one possession by each team. If the score is still tied after one period, they go to a second period or as many as needed to determine a winner. If the first team which is awarded the ball scores, the opponent still has a chance to win the game. If the defense intercepts the pass or fumble and returns it for a touchdown, they win the game. If they do not return the interception for a touchdown, the ball will belong to the defense, as the offense did not convert their chance. They must convert to win, or another period starts. Each team is entitled to one time-out per overtime period.

VI. General Gameplay

a. Prior to the Snap

- i. Each team receives four (4) downs to gain 15 yards and a new set of downs or to reach the end zone. First downs are at the 25-yard line and 10-yard line.
- ii. After a score the next possession will begin at the team's 10-yard line (40 yards from goal line).
- iii. Flag Football is a skill sport, and NO DELIBERATE contact is permitted. Inadvertent contact is allowed, but this is left to the referee's judgement.
- iv. **FLAGS:**
 - 1. All players on the field must start the play with flags on hips, any player not adhering to this rule will be first issued a warning, then may be removed from the game until flags are adjusted correctly. Any player caught purposely breaking this rule after the initial warning is subject to removal from the game entirely.
- v. The offense has **25 seconds** to snap the ball from the whistle of the previous dead ball.
 - 1. Failure to do so will result in a 5-yard penalty.
- vi. **Motion:** One offensive player may be in motion prior to the snap of the ball, but not in motion towards opponent's goal line.
- vii. **Line of Scrimmage:** The offensive team must have a minimum of 3 players on the line of scrimmage to start a play.
- viii. Play starts with **snap by the center between the legs** with the QB either under center or in the shotgun position. No Dead ball will be called on the Center to QB exchange

b. Offense

- i. **Quarterback:** The player that receives the snap may NOT run unless the ball has been handed, pitched, or thrown back to him/her in the backfield.
 - 1. The quarterback has **7 seconds** to pass the ball if there is no rush. If the ball is not thrown, the play is dead. The ball returns to the line of scrimmage. (Once the ball has been handed off, pitched, or there is a pursuing pass rusher, there is no 7-second count).
 - 2. Teams may handoff, pitch, or throw back the football in the backfield. The player who receives the pitch or handoff may throw the ball as long as he/she is not beyond the line of scrimmage. Pitching (backward) is allowed downfield.

3. **Stiff arms are prohibited.** 5-yard penalty
4. **A Player running with the ball may not dive in order to advance the ball farther.** 5-yard penalty

1. NO RUN ZONES:

- a. **5U thru 7U:** This rule is not applied. Can run anywhere on the field.
- b. **9U thru 13U:** No run zones are located 10 yards before the end zone. You may not run the ball in the no run zone. Only forward passes are allowed.

iii. **Receiving:**

1. All players are eligible to receive a pass, including the quarterback, if the ball has been pitched back or handed off behind the line of scrimmage. Players must have at least one foot in bounds when making a catch. Players that run out of bounds during a play cannot be the first player to touch a ball when attempting to make a catch.
2. Players may dive in an attempt to catch the ball, but once running may not dive in order to advance the ball.

iv. **Spotting the Ball:**

1. Ball is spotted where the flag is pulled.
2. Play is ruled dead when the offensive player's flag is pulled. Ball carrier steps out of bounds, a touchdown is scored, or ball carriers' knee touches the ground. Play is ruled dead on incomplete pass or Ball hits the ground. **If a player loses a flag unintentionally, the defense only has to touch the ball carrier, not pull the flag.** Players may not start a play without a flag on each hip.
3. Anytime the ball touches the ground during an offensive possession the play is deemed over and a dead ball is called. The offense will retain possession at the spot the ball touched the ground. **EXCEPTION: if ball touches ground off the snap only, the QB can pick it up and continue play.**

v. **Blocking:**

1. **NO BLOCKING OF ANY TYPE IS PERMITTED – NO player shall INTENTIONALLY initiate contact with any other player while the ball is in play.**
2. **Players may screen block (see definitions) or get in the way but CANNOT initiate any contact.**

vi. **Scoring**

1. All touchdowns are worth 6 points.
2. Extra Point Options: 9u thru 13u - must indicate to Referee which option you are choosing.
 - a. **Option 1:** from 3 yards out, a pass into the end zone is worth 1 point – no rushing allowed.
 - b. **Option 2:** from 10 yards out, a pass into the end zone is worth 2 points – no rushing allowed.
3. Safety – if ball carriers flag is pulled in their own end zone or a fumble resulting in a dead ball occurs in the offensive team's end zone – 2 points will be awarded to the defensive team.

vii. **Penalties:**

1. **Pre-Snap Penalties** – these are not a loss of down. Illegal motion /False Start/ delay of game/ illegal equipment violation – a player may not start a play without flags. All a 5-yard penalty.
2. **Flag guarding** (players must keep their hands above their waist).
3. **Charging/Blocking** (the offensive player must avoid the defender if they are set).
4. **Delay of game** – 5 yard Penalty/ 2 delay of game penalties in same possession results in a turnover. **9u-13u Only**
5. **Pass interference** (illegal pick, pushing off defender).
6. **Blocking** –Players may not block
7. **Excessive contact** – If the official feels it was intentional or with intent to harm the player will be ejected from game.
8. **All offensive penalties are five yards from the line of scrimmage and loss of down except flag guarding which is a spot foul and the pre-snap penalties mentioned above.**

viii. **Special Provisions by Age Group**

1. **5U:**

- a. Any combination of running or passing is allowed at all points on the field.
- b. No Dead ball will be called on the Center to QB exchange
- c. Ball must be snapped within 35 seconds of the whistle from the previous play.
- d. Extra point options: all 5 yards from end zone.
 - i. Rushing – 1 Point
 - ii. Passing – 2 points
- e. Scores will be kept during the game, but no records will be recorded and no playoffs will be played.
- f. **Two Coaches** for each team are allowed on the field at all times.

2. **7U - Only**

- a. **One Coach** is allowed on the field for **Offense ONLY** – but upon the snap of the ball the coach must be at least 15 yards from the line of scrimmage.
 - i. If a coach is contacted by a player during the course of regular gameplay impeding him/her from making a play – the offending team will be penalized 10 yards from the spot of the foul.

3. **9U thru 13u**

- a. **No Coaches** are allowed on the field at any time.

c. **Defense**

i. **Prior to the Snap:**

1. All defensive players must remain 2 yards from the line of scrimmage prior to the snap of the ball. Marked by a cone.

ii. **Rushing the passer:**

1. **Designated Rusher:** The defensive team may select **ONE** designated rusher for each down. This player can be rotated every play, but player must identify themselves to the Referee before each play by raising hands in the air and yelling “RUSHER”

- a. This player must start a minimum of 5 yards from the line of scrimmage. The official will designate this spot on the field.
 - b. If the defensive team rushes the QB there is no 7-second count. INT's may be returned. The rusher may not hit the quarterbacks' arm or knock the ball out of the quarterbacks' hand. **The rusher must play the flags.**
 - c. Players not rushing the QB may defend the **line of scrimmage.**
 - d. **Designated Rusher CANNOT be screen blocked.**
2. **Diving is allowed** in an attempt to grab the opponents flag:
 - a. **However** if the resulting dive of the defensive player does not result in a pulling of the flag, but causes the offensive player to stumble and fall resulting in another defensive player pulling the flag. **Then the offensive team is awarded 5 additional yards from the spot of the foul and an automatic first down.**
 3. **Rushing:** Once the ball is handed off or thrown by the quarterback, all players on the field can pursue the ball anywhere on the field.

iii. Defending the Pass:

1. If a player attempts a catch or intercept while in the air, the player must contact the ground inbounds with the ball in his/her possession prior to touching out-of-bounds, unless an opponent's contact causes him/her to first touch out-of-bounds.
2. If one foot first lands in-bounds and the receiver has possession and control of the ball, it is a catch or interception although a subsequent step or fall takes the receiver out-of-bounds.
3. A loss of ball simultaneously with returning to the ground is not a catch or interception.
4. A player may, while jumping in the air to attempt a catch, may pass (tip) the ball forward provided he/she has not touched the ground yet.

iv. Penalties

1. **Offside-Illegal Rush.** Player(s) who are not lined up 5 yards from line of scrimmage rushes into the offensive backfield prior to pass or handoff. Also if the designated rusher leaves the designated rusher spot prior to snap.
2. **Pass interference /Face Guarding** – Players must play/look at the football when engaging a receiver downfield.
3. **Illegal contact** (holding, bump and run coverage, or blocking with contact) *
Note the officials will determine incidental contact which may result from normal run of play. A defensive player may not hold up an offensive player by holding any part of the body allowing a defensive teammate to remove the flag.
4. **Roughing the quarterback** – the rusher may not knock the ball out of the quarterback's hand or bump into them.
5. **Excessive contact** – even if the defender is making a play on the ball. If the official feels it was intentional or with intent to harm the player will be ejected from the game and may be removed from the league.
6. **Illegal Procedure:** Defensive players moving across the line of scrimmage prior to the snap of the ball. (Not the 2 yard cone)

7. All defensive penalties are five yards from the line of scrimmage. Except Offside's and Illegal Procedure— spot foul plus 5, pass interference – 15 yards from line of scrimmage and Roughing the QB, Major 15 – Minor 5.

v. Special Provisions by Age Group

1. **5U:** Rushing the passer is prohibited. No defensive player shall be allowed to cross the line of scrimmage as long as the quarterback has the ball.
 - a. **Exception:** Once the ball is handed off or thrown to another offensive player, all defensive players are allowed to pursue the ball anywhere on the field.
 - b. Interceptions will result in a change of possession but cannot be advanced by the defensive team.
2. **7U thru 13U**
 - a. Interceptions may be advanced down the field by the defensive team and will result in a turnover and the ball being spotted where it is whistled dead by the Referee or resulting in a touchdown for the defensive team.

d. Punting

5U thru 13U - Team can elect to take a protected scrimmage kick, or place the ball on the 25 yd line.

- i. Prior to making the ball ready for play on fourth down, the Referee must ask the offense if he/she wants a protected kick (punt). The Referee must communicate this decision to the defensive captain and the other officials.
- ii. The offense must have all field players (typically 6) except the punter on the line of scrimmage. All players on the line of scrimmage must remain motionless until the kick is made. No player may enter the neutral zone until the ball is punted.
- iii. After receiving the snap, the kicker must kick the ball immediately and in a continuous motion.
- iv. While any punt is in flight beyond the offense scrimmage line, no punting team's player shall touch the ball, nor obstruct the receiving team's path to the ball.
- v. The ball may only be advanced by the returning team on a catch. If at any time the ball touches the ground after it has been kicked it is deemed a dead ball.