USA FOOTBALL

7-ON-7 FLAG RULE BOOK

American Development Model

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1 / TERMINOLOGY

BOUNDARY LINES	The outer perimeter lines around the field. They include the sidelines and back of the end zone lines.
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.
DEAD BALL	Refers to the period of time immediately before or after a play.
DEFENSE	The team opposing the offense to prevent it from advancing the ball.
DOWNS	The offensive team has four attempts or “downs” to advance the ball. It must cross the line to gain to get another set of downs or to score.
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 or arm.
INADVERTENT WHISTLE	Official’s whistle that is performed in error.
LATERAL	A backward or sideway toss of the ball by the ball-carrier. There are no legal laterals or pitches allowed in USA Football 7-on-7 Flag.
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. In USA Football 7-on-7 flag, this is the midfield point.
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.
OFFENSE	The team with possession of the ball.

PASS CLOCK	Offensive teams have seven seconds to throw a pass or make a handoff once the snap is made. If the quarterback still has the ball after an official counts off seven seconds, the play is dead and the ball returns to the line of scrimmage as if an incomplete pass occurred.
PASSER	The offensive player who throws the ball and may or may not be the quarterback.
RUSH LINE	An imaginary line running across the width of the field seven yards (into the defensive side) from the line of scrimmage.
RUSHER	The defensive player(s) assigned to rush the quarterback to prevent him/her from passing the ball by pulling his/her flags or by blocking the pass.
SHOVEL PASS	A legal forward pitch attempted from behind the line of scrimmage traveling beyond the line of scrimmage.
UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT	A rude, confrontational or offensive behavior or language.
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.

2 / POSITIONS

Offense

1. The seven players on offense consist of a center, a quarterback and five eligible receivers. Two of those receivers must be on the line of scrimmage at the snap – each positioned on opposite sides of the center.
   a. **Center.** This player's sole responsibility is to snap the ball to begin the play, a critical skill at all levels of football. Once the center has delivered the football to the quarterback – either directly or from a pistol or shotgun formation – the center may go out for a pass.
   b. **Quarterback.** This player receives the snap from the center and initiates the play either through a handoff or pass. The quarterback cannot directly run with the ball across the line of scrimmage without first handing the ball off to a teammate and then receiving a second handoff back or receiving a pass.
   c. **Receiver/back.** Any player who does not initiate the snap nor receive the snap is considered an eligible receiver/back and can either receive a handoff or catch a pass. Two receivers must be on the line of scrimmage at the snap – on opposite sides of the center – while the other three are at least one yard behind the line of scrimmage in either a slot or running back position. No player other than the quarterback may line up within three yards of the center.

      i. **NOTE:** Leagues may consider waiving the restriction on lining within three yards of the center for younger age groups.

Defense

All players on defense are eligible to rush the quarterback or drop back into coverage.

1. **Rusher.** Any player who rushes the quarterback must be a minimum of five yards behind the line of scrimmage at the snap. For fields that do not include yard lines, officials will mark this five-yard zone before every play.

   a. Following a legal handoff, any member of the defense can cross the line of scrimmage.

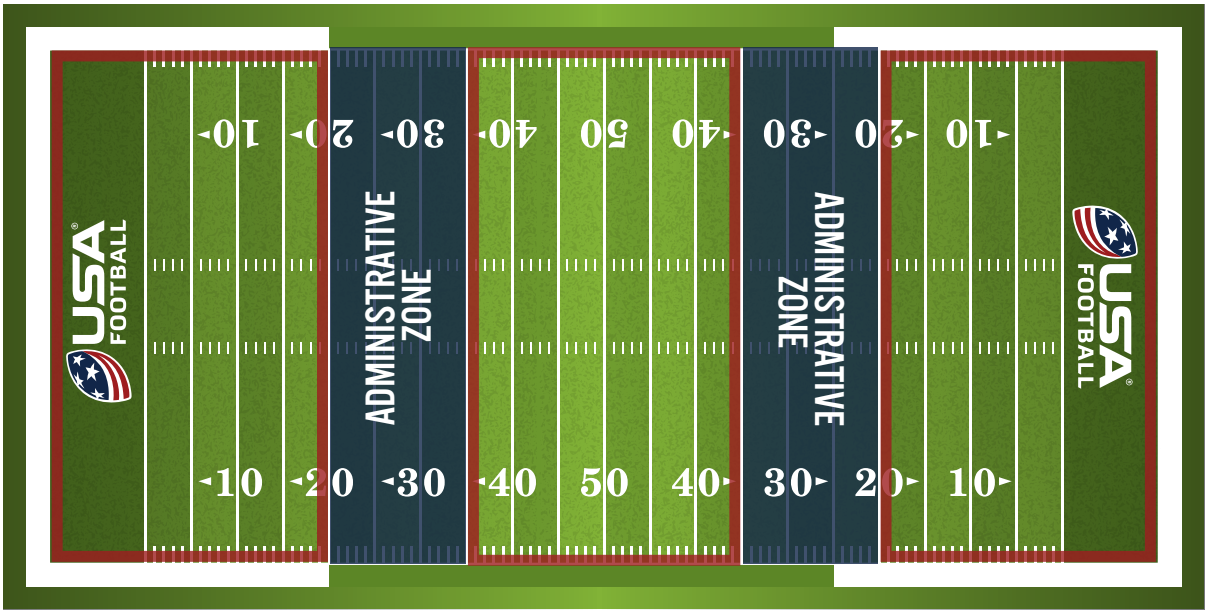
3 / GENERAL RULES

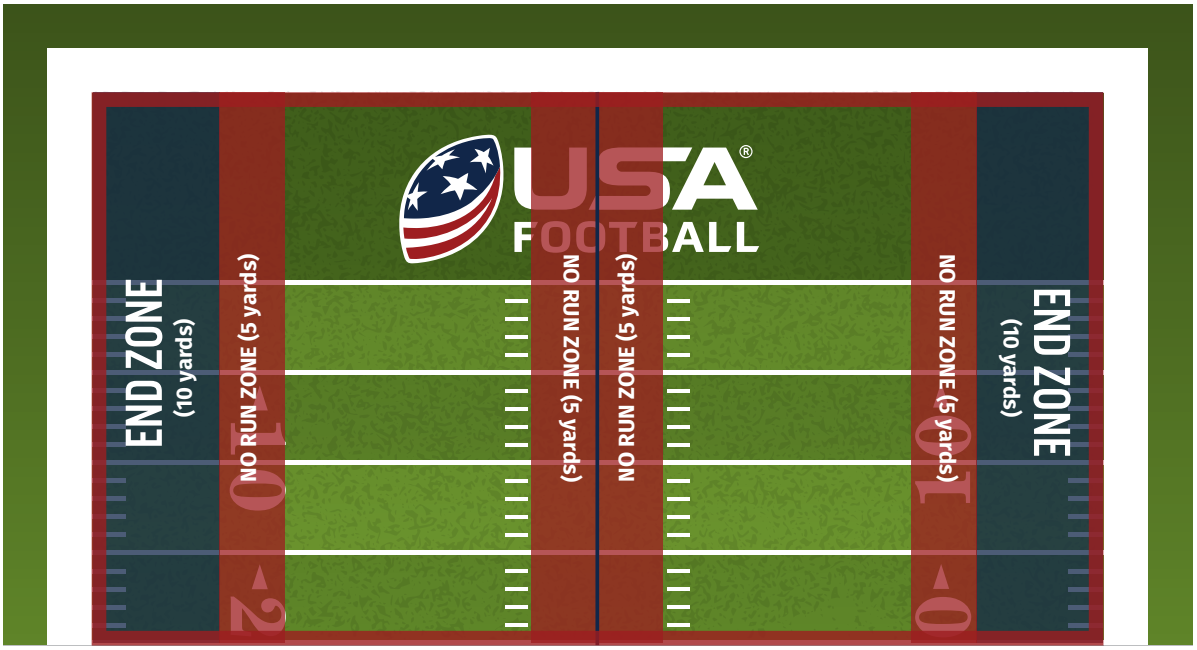
1. At the start of each game, captains from both teams meet at midfield for the coin toss to determine who starts with the ball. The visiting team calls the toss.
2. The winner of the coin toss has the choice of offense or defense. The loser of the coin toss has the choice of direction. Possession changes to start the second half to the team that started the game on defense.
3. The offensive team takes possession of the ball at its 5-yard line and has four plays to cross midfield. Once a team crosses midfield, it has four plays to score a touchdown. Crossing midfield is the only opportunity for an offense to gain a first down within a single possession.
4. If the offense fails to score, the ball changes possession and the new offensive team starts its drive on its own 5-yard line.
5. If the offensive team fails to cross midfield, possession of the ball changes and the opposition starts its drive from its own 5-yard line.
6. If the defense intercepts the ball, a defensive player can attempt to return it until down, out of bounds or possession of the ball is lost.
7. All possession changes, except interceptions, start on the offense's 5-yard line.
8. Teams change sides after the first half. Possession changes to the team that started the game on defense.

4 / EQUIPMENT

1. Each player must wear SBFFA jerseys and USA flag belts with pop flags. Teams will use footballs suitable for the age division.
    a. Flag belts may not be the same color as the shorts or pants.
2. Cleats with exposed metal are not allowed and must be removed.
3. Players may tape their forearms, hands and fingers. Players may wear gloves, elbow pads and knee pads. Braces with exposed metals are not allowed. Players are encouraged to wear mouth pieces during practices and games.
4. Players must remove all jewelry, hats and do-rags. Winter beanies are allowed.
5. Players' jerseys must be tucked into shorts or pants if they hang below the belt line.
6. We recommend players wear shorts or pants that do not have pockets. Shorts or pants with belt loops or pockets must be taped. Games will not be delayed for a player to tape up pockets.

5 / PLAYING FIELD





6 / TIMING AND OVERTIME

1. Games are played on a 40-minute continuous clock with two 20-minute halves. The clock stops for timeouts or injuries only, though officials can stop the clock at their discretion for injury, to stop a team from delaying or other unsportsmanlike conduct.
2. Halftime is five minutes.
3. Each time the ball is spotted, a team has 30 seconds to snap the ball. Teams will receive one warning before a delay-of-game penalty is enforced.
    a. **NOTE:** USA Football recommends that officials should use discretion with younger ages who may need more time to line up and get a play off.
4. Each team has two 30-second timeouts per half.
5. In the event of an injury, the clock will stop then restart when the injured player is removed from the field of play and both teams are lined up ready to restart the play.
6. If the score is tied at the end of 40 minutes, an overtime period will be used to determine a winner. The overtime format is as follows:
    a. A coin flip will determine the team that chooses to be on offense or defense first.
        i. If a second round of overtime must be played, the team that lost the coin toss will get to choose offense or defense for the start of the second round of overtime. This process continues with teams alternating who gets to choose to be on offense or defense to start out during every round of overtime.
        ii. The referee will determine which end of the field the overtime will take place on.
    b. Each team will take turns getting one play from the defense's 5-yard line for one point or the defense's 10-yard line for two points. Whether to go for one or two points is up to the offensive team. Whether or not the team that begins on offense converts, the team that started on defense gets a chance on offense to win or tie by converting a one- or two-point play of its own.
        i. Example: Team A starts on offense and chooses to go for one point from the 5-yard line and is successful. Team B is then on offense and can choose to either go for one point from the five-yard line to tie and force a second round of overtime or to go for two points from the 10-yard line for the win.
        ii. If the second team on offense in an overtime round fails to beat or match the team that went first, the team that went first wins.
    c. All regulation period rules and penalties are in effect
    d. There are no timeouts in overtime.

7 / SCORING

1. **Touchdown**: Six points
2. **PAT** (point after touchdown) one point from the 5-yard line or two points from the 10-yard line.
    a. Because of the no-run zone, a one point PAT is pass only; two point PAT can be run or pass. **NOTE:** At younger levels, leagues should consider waiving the no-run zone for first downs, touchdowns and point-after tries.
    b. A team that scores a touchdown must declare prior to the snap whether it wishes to attempt a one- or two-point conversion. Any change, once a decision is made to try for the extra point, requires a charged timeout. A decision cannot be changed after a penalty. Interceptions on conversions cannot be returned.
3. **Safety**: Two points
    a. A safety occurs when the ball-carrier is declared down in his or her own end zone. Runners can be called down when their flags are pulled by a defensive player, a flag falls out, they step out of bounds, a 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.
    b. **USA Football Recommendation:** Safeties can be eliminated at the younger levels. For flag pulls in the end zone or runners running out of the back or sides of the end zone, the ball returns to the original spot or the 5-yard line and the down is lost.
4. After one team is leading by 32 points or more, the leading team will have 2 attempts to get a first down and 2 attempts to score a TD. The trailing team will still have 4 opportunities to get a first down and 4 oppopportunities to score a TD.
    a. All such situations are scored 32-0 for the winning team.

7 / COACHES

1. No coach is allowed on the field to call plays and direct players according to need. Coaches must remain on the sideline to call plays.
2. Coaches can assist in the alignment of their players to facilitate a fast-paced game. Coaches on the sidelines can provide this information to players on the field.

9 / LIVE BALL DEAD BALL

1. The ball is live at the snap and remains live until an official's whistle blows the ball dead.

2. The official will indicate the neutral zone and line of scrimmage by spotting the ball before each play and signaling ready for play with a short whistle.
   a. It is an automatic dead ball foul if any player on defense or offense enters the neutral zone. In regard to the neutral zone, an official may give both teams a "courtesy" neutral zone notification prior to the snap to allow their players to move back behind the line of scrimmage.

3. The defense may not mimic the offensive team's signals by trying to confuse the offensive players while the quarterback is calling signals to start the play. This will result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty.

4. A player who gains possession of the ball is considered inbounds as long as one foot comes down in the field of play.

5. Substitutions may be made on any dead ball.

6. Any official can whistle the play dead.

7. Play is ruled "dead" when:
   a. The ball hits the ground
   b. If the ball hits the ground as a result of a bad snap, the ball is then placed where the ball hit the ground
   c. The ball-carrier's flag is pulled
   d. The ball-carrier steps out of bounds
   e. A touchdown, PAT or safety is scored
   f. Any part of the body other than feet or hands touches the ground
   g. The ball-carrier's flag falls out
   h. The receiver catches the ball while in possession of one or no flag(s)
   i. An inadvertent whistle

8. In the case of an inadvertent whistle, the offense has two options:
   a. Take the ball where it was when the whistle blew, and the down is consumed.
   b. Replay the down from the original line of scrimmage.

9. A team is allowed to use a timeout to question an official's rule interpretation. If the official's ruling is correct, the team is charged a timeout. If the rule is interpreted incorrectly, the timeout is not charged and the proper ruling will be enforced. Officials should all agree upon any controversial call in order to give each team the full benefit of each call.

10. A team with no time out remaining cannot challenge a rule interpretation, though officials can come together independently and reverse a call by unanimous decision.

10 / RUNNING

1. The ball is spotted where the runner's front foot is when the flag is pulled, not the position of the ball.

2. The quarterback cannot directly run with the ball across the line of scrimmage without first handing the ball off to a teammate and then receiving a second handoff back or receiving a pass.

3. Only direct handoffs behind the line of scrimmage are permitted. Handoffs may be in front, behind or to the side of the offensive player but must take place behind the line of scrimmage. The offense may use multiple handoffs.
   a. The "center sneak" play is not allowed as centers are ineligible to receive handoffs.

4. Laterals are allowed, including pitches and throwbacks.
5. No-Run Zones are located five yards before the end zone and five yards before midfield in the direction the offense is headed. They are designed to avoid short-yardage, power-running situations. Teams are not allowed to run in these zones.
6. Any player who receives a handoff can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage.
7. Once the ball has been handed off in front, behind or to the side of the quarterback, all defensive players are eligible to rush.
8. Runners may not leave their feet to advance the ball. Diving, leaping or jumping to avoid a flag pull is considered flag guarding.
9. Spinning is allowed, but players cannot leave their feet to avoid a flag pull. Players spinning out of control will be called for flag guarding.
10. Runners may leave their feet if there is a clear indication that he/she has done so to avoid collision with another player without a flag guarding penalty enforced.

11. No blocking or "screening" is allowed at any time.
12. Offensive players without the ball must stop their motion once the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage. There is no running with the ball-carrier.
13. 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.
14. Flag guarding is an attempt by the ball-carrier to obstruct the defender's access to the flags by stiff arming, dropping the head, hand, arm or shoulder or intentionally covering the flags with the football jersey.

11 / PASSING

1. All passes must be from behind the line of scrimmage, thrown forward and received beyond the line of scrimmage.
   a. All passes that do not cross the line of scrimmage, whether received or not, are illegal forward passes.
   b. The quarterback may throw the ball away to avoid a sack. The pass must go beyond the line of scrimmage and be in the vicinity of a receiver per NFHS rules.
   c. Quarterbacks cannot spike the ball dead unless the ball travels beyond the line of scrimmage and is in the vicinity of a teammate.
2. A seven-second pass clock begins upon the snap and continues until there is a handoff or pass. If the seven-second clock expires while the quarterback still has the ball, the play is blown dead, a down is lost and the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage as if an incomplete pass occurred.
3. Shovel passes are allowed but must be received beyond the line of scrimmage.
4. Any payer who has received a legal handoff can throw the ball forward.

12 / RECEIVING

1. All players are eligible to receive passes.
2. A player must have at least one foot inbounds to make a legal reception.
3. In the case of simultaneous possession by both an offensive and defensive player, possession is awarded to the offense.
4. Interceptions change possession at the point of the catch. Interceptions are returnable and are the only changes of possession that do not result with starting on the 5-yard line.
5. The play is blown dead immediately if an interception is made on an extra-point try. There are no returns on that play.

13 / RUSHING THE PASSER

1. All players who rush the passer must be a minimum of five yards behind the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped. 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 five yard rule no longer is in effect, and all defenders may go behind the line of scrimmage.
3. A marker, or the referee, will designate a rush line five yards from the line of scrimmage. Defensive players should verify they are in the correct position with the official on every play.
4. A rusher who leaves the rush line early (breaks the five yard area) may return to the rush line, reset and then legally rush the quarterback.
5. Teams are not required to rush the quarterback.
6. Teams are not required to identify their rusher before the play.
7. Players rushing the quarterback may attempt to block a pass. However, no contact can be made with the quarterback in any way. Blocking the pass or attempting to block the pass and then making contact with the passer still results in a roughing the passer penalty.
8. The offense cannot impede the rusher in any way. The rusher has the right to a clear path to the quarterback, regardless of where he or she lines up prior to the snap. 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.
9. A sack occurs if the quarterback's flag is pulled behind the line of scrimmage. The ball is placed where the quarterback's front foot was when flag was pulled.
    a. A safety is awarded if the sack takes place in the offensive team's end zone – unless an exception is made for younger age groups, instead returning the ball to the offense on the line of scrimmage or 5-yard line with a loss of down.

14 / 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 the play, the player is down immediately upon possession of the ball and the play ends. The ball is placed where the flag lands.
5. A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off of a player who is not in possession of the ball.
    a. If a defender makes a good-faith flag pull while a receiver bobbles or juggles what will be a completed catch, the ball is down where posession is made.

15 / PENALTIES

General

1. The officials will call all penalties.
2. Game officials 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. Only the team captain or head coach may ask the referee questions about rule clarification and interpretations. Other players, coaches and fans may not question calls.
5. Games and halves may not end on a penalty unless the opposing team declines it.
6. Penalties are assessed live ball then dead ball. Live ball penalties must be assessed before play is considered complete.
7. Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal line when the penalty yardage is more than half the distance to the goal.

Defensive spot fouls

Defensive pass interference	Automatic first down
Holding	Automatic first down
Stripping	+10 yards and automatic first down

Offensive spot fouls

Screening, blocking or running with the ball	-10 yards and loss of down
Charging	-10 yards and loss of down
Flag guarding	-10 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	+Five yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Illegal rush (Starting rush from inside 7-yard marker)	+Five yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Illegal flag pull (Before the receiver has the ball)	+Five yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Roughing the passer	+Five yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Taunting	+Five 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	-Five 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)	-Five yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Offensive pass interference	-Five yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Illegal motion (More than one person moving)	-Five yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Delay of game	-Five yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Impeding the rusher	-Five yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down