



Next Level Sports **Youth Flag Football** **League Rules**



The following in this document is the official ruleset for the Next Level Flag Football Youth Leagues. Anything not covered in these rules will fall under the jurisdiction of the referees and/or league officials.

1. Players:

- a) Each team will field (6) players on **Offense and Defense.**
- b) A minimum of (5) players are required to field a team --- the opposing team may still field all (6) players. Once you agree to start game with 5 players, you cannot decide to put a 6th player on field after that unless the other team's 6th player shows up!!!

2. Equipment:

- a) **Ball sizes for each grade (Co-Ed):**
 - a. **Pre-K3 – 1st Grade- Nike Vapor Strike Pee Wee Ball**
 - b. **2nd-4th Grade- White Next Level Pee Wee Ball**
 - c. **5th-6th and 6/7th Grade- Multi-Color Next Level Junior Ball**
 - d. **7th & 8th Grade- Blue Next Level Youth Ball**
 - e. **Teams may only use the provided ball for their division. No outside footballs allowed.**
- b) All players must wear a mouthpiece, also a protective cup during the game (if applicable).
- c) Matching jerseys are required on the field of play.
- d) **Players are to tuck their shirts in. Flags must be on each hip and must be a different color than the players shorts/pants. If the ball carrier's shirt is untucked, covering the flags, and/or a flag(s) is not on the hip, the referees will blow the play dead at their discretion.**
 - a. **Pre-K thru 1st grade – 3-flag Quick Clip belts**
 - b. **2nd grade & up – 2-flag "Charter Linkz" or "Next Level" Belts - one on each hip with no back flag**
- e) Flag belts must always be completely visible and may not be altered in any way. If a player is caught with his or her flag tied to the belt, that player will be ejected.
- f) No metal cleats, hard football pads, hard braces, or casts. any other illegal equipment.
- g) Only the QB is allowed to wear a hand warmer pouch! If they do have one on & it gets tugged at or pulled, blow the play dead at that spot like a flag has been pulled. If it is grabbed and doesn't come off, defensive holding will not be called.
- h) There are no sunglasses OR glasses with metal frames (prescription or not) allowed to be worn!!! All players must have sports goggles or plastic framed glasses with a strap!!! (This is for safety reasons)
- i) Hoodies can be worn but the hood must be tucked in.
- j) **Softshell helmets are now OPTIONAL FOR ALL AGE GROUPS!!!**

3. Coin Toss:

- a) Visiting team will call the coin toss. (Regular season & playoffs)
- b) The winner has two choices to start the game – (1) receive the ball --- (2) defend. The loser of the toss decides which end of the field they would like to defend to start the game.
- c) Teams switch direction in the 2nd half and the team that started the game on Defense will start the 2nd half on Offense.

4. Game Timing:

- a) A game will consist of two 24-minute halves. The clock will continue to run throughout the game and will only be stopped by using a timeout and/or at the 1-minute warning. At that point, it will be a pro clock in the last minute of both halves.
- b) On a bad snap inside of one minute, the clock runs.
- c) Each team will receive (2) timeouts in the 1st half & (3) timeouts in the 2nd half. Each timeout will be 20 seconds in length. Time-outs can only be called by the head coach or a designated coach.
- d) Games must start on time (or as close as possible if delayed). Due to field availability, teams must be ready to go at their scheduled gametime. If a team is more than ten minutes late, that team will forfeit the game. If a team is less than ten minutes late, the team that was on time will have the option to receive the ball both halves.
- e) There is no penalty for a team using back-to-back timeouts.
- f) If a player gets hurt and is on ground for more than 25-30 seconds, stop the clock. If it happens inside 1 minute, use your discretion to stop it.
- g) The referee's count:
 - a. Pre-k thru 1st grade: 5 count
 - b. 2nd grade thru 8th grade: 4 count
- h) Once a play is run, it supersedes anything that happened prior to that play.

5. Rules:

- a) Only the HEAD COACH is allowed to question a call and to have an officials' conference.
- b) Each team is permitted no more than THREE coaches on their sideline. The game will be stopped if necessary to clear the sideline.
- c) Offensive teams are allowed one forward pass per play. Pitch backs are okay and does not count as a forward pass. Shuffle passes are allowed.
- d) Once the offensive team breaks the huddle, the coach is not allowed back in the huddle to change play. If he does, it is a foul for too many men on the field.
- e) Taunting a player before entering the end-zone will be a 10 yd. unsportsmanlike penalty to be assessed on the extra point.
- f) IN ALL DIVISIONS: If a team turns over the ball via interception or turnover on downs inside the 5 yd line, the defensive team will take over at that spot! The ball will **NOT** be moved out to the 5 yd line.
- g) If there is an injury timeout, the injured player must sit out one play. This can be nullified if the team with the injured player calls timeout or if the injury is the result of a penalty by the opposing team.

6. Blocking:

- a) There is **NO BLOCKING** for the ball carrier; **HOWEVER**, offensive players may set a basketball style pick. **A player cannot pick the rusher on a pass play as the rusher must have free range to move along the line of scrimmage! You can pick the rusher on running plays only if the handoff is simultaneous to the pick or has happened.**
- b) An offensive player can run behind the ball carrier if it does not prevent a defender from making a play on the ball carrier.
- c) No offensive player is allowed to be moving immediately near the ball carrier to set a pick beyond the line of scrimmage if a defender is trying to make a play. A player may move if he doesn't impede a defender from attempting to pull a flag.
- d) **Individual basketball style picks must be at least shoulder length apart. There cannot be any 2 on 1 picks on a defender & there are NO WALLS!!!!**

7. Dead Balls/End of Play

- a) **The following are considered dead balls or end of the play:**
 - a. **If he loses possession backwards (i.e. lateral/pitch), the ball will be spotted where it hits the ground.**
 - b. **If the ball touches the ground at any time.**
 - c. **Any part of the ball carriers body hits the ground, except for the feet and or hands.**
 - d. **The flag falls off the ball carrier or slides down the runner's waist, it will be considered a pulled flag.**
 - e. **If the flag falls off of the QB or if he has no flag before the end of the 4 count, the play will continue & he must pass the ball before the 4 second count ends. If he does not, the play ends, the down counts and the ball is brought back to the previous spot. If the snap is dropped, the play is over and the ball is spotted where the ball hit the ground. In either scenario, it is similar to a fumble and the clock runs during the pro-clock.**
 - f. **If an offensive and defensive player catches the ball simultaneously, it is awarded to the offense at the spot, provided his flag is pulled.**
 - g. **If a player catches a ball while his knee is down or if his flag had already fallen off before the catch is made, the catch is legal but the ball cannot be advanced**

8. Frozen Zones (BLUE CONES):

- a) **Five yards before the end-zones**, a team is considered "frozen". If the ball is spotted anywhere in the **Frozen Zone**, the offense is **ONLY** allowed to pass the ball. The offense cannot run the ball for the yardage needed even after the referee's count, but the defense can still rush after the count.
- b) **All plays in the Frozen Zone MUST BE A FORWARD PASS BY THE QB only**, beyond the line of scrimmage. **There are no handoffs when frozen.** If any other player but the QB throws a pass, it will be considered an illegal pass & a flag will be thrown!

- c) Once the offense is inside the Frozen Zone, they remain frozen, even if they commit a penalty or get sacked outside the frozen zone. They still must pass.
- d) It is not considered an illegal forward pass in the frozen zone if the QB spikes the ball immediately after the snap to legally conserve time.

9. Interceptions:

- a) If a defensive player intercepts a pass, they may run it back. **HOWEVER**, once the interception is made, the team now becomes the offensive team and must obey the rules of the offense.
- b) If after an interception in the end zone, the ball carrier or intercepting team commits a foul in the end zone, it will be a **TOUCHBACK** since the spot of the foul is in the end zone. The penalty will be enforced on the change of possession, half the distance to the goal. It is not a safety!

10. Fumbles or Loss of Possession:

- a) If a player is running with the ball & loses possession or laterals to the opposing team without the ball hitting the ground, the ball can be advanced/returned by the defense.
- b) If the ball hits the ground forward of the loss of possession, the play will end at the spot of the fumble.
- c) If the ball hits the ground at or behind the spot of the loss of possession, the ball will be placed where it hit the ground.

11. Mercy Rule:

If a team is winning by (17) points or more at the one-minute warning, **THE GAME IS OVER REGARDLESS OF WHO HAS THE BALL! This rule does include the playoffs!**

12. Defense:

- a) The defensive player must wait for the (4) count (1st grade – 5 count) before crossing the line of scrimmage. The defensive player can cross the line of scrimmage prior to the (4) count **ONLY** if blitzing or there is a handoff, pitch/lateral or forward pass. Play action does not count.
- b) **BLITZING** (does not apply 3RD grade or lower) – The defense will be allowed to blitz one time per 4 downs. There is no restriction on how many defenders can blitz or distance away from the line of scrimmage. Defenders must wait for the referee to count to 2 before crossing the line. The defense may not blitz when the offense is frozen, on the conversion attempts, or if they are winning by 17 or more. If the defense tries to blitz a 2nd time in a series of downs, an illegal blitz (5-yard) penalty will be called. Any additional attempts in the same series will result in a 10-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty assessed to the head coach. The defense will get their blitz back in a series if the offense gains a 1st down (yardage or penalty) or if the result of a penalty nullifies the result of the play, **including offsetting penalties!!! (THIS IS IN EFFECT FOR PLAYOFFS)**

- c) A defensive player is allowed to leave their feet to pull a flag. However, in doing so, it must not impede the runner. (**Example:** The runner has the ball and the defender dives for the flags from behind.) If so, it can be a penalty for tripping or unnecessary roughness.

13. Offense:

- a) The offensive team starts on their own **(5) yard line**. If they get to 4th down, the offense must declare if they are going for it or punting. If they elect to punt, 30 yards will be walked off by the official from the line of scrimmage. However, the furthest a punt will go back is to the opponents **(5) yard line**. If they try on 4th down and do not make it, the defensive team gets the ball at the spot of the end of the play. **(This is in effect for all divisions from 2nd grade and up).**
- b) ***NEW* - There will be Yellow 1st down cone at the 20-yard line on each side of the field, giving the offense a chance at 2 first downs.**
- c) The offense has 30 seconds to call and start execution of a play after the referee sets the ball at the line of scrimmage and blows the ready whistle or they will be penalized for a **Delay of Game**.
- d) **The snapper can face any direction.** The snap can be from the side or between the legs. It is suggested that it is tossed or dropped but is not mandatory. The snap must occur within 5 yards on either side of where the ball/marker is placed. The snapper cannot receive the 1st handoff and must run a route beyond the line of scrimmage to be the first to touch the ball. The snapper can receive a handoff **ONLY** if it has been passed or handed off to someone else first.
- e) The offense can run the ball prior to the 4 second count (1st grade – 5 count) but only on a handoff, blitz, lateral or backwards pass and they are not frozen.
- f) The Quarterback can run with the ball **ONLY** after the 4-count (1st grade – 5 count) unless blitzed & they still have their one run. The quarterback cannot be frozen or have run already on that section of the field. **The offense would only get another QB run if the result of a penalty nullifies the result of the play, including offsetting penalties!!!**
- g) Receivers must have (1) foot inbounds for it to be a completed pass. The 1st foot must be inbounds!!!
- h) The Quarterback must line up behind the giver to call **HIKE** and is the only one who can receive the snap. **There are no SILENT COUNTS or DIRECT SNAPS to a RB or WR.**
- i) When the flag is pulled the ball will be spotted where the **ball carrier's waist was when flag was pulled, NOT THE BALL.**
- j) The ball carrier can spin, juke, jump or “dip” to avoid a defender. He cannot guard the flag, dive, or hurdle to avoid a defender. The runner may not charge into a defensive player.
- k) All players must be at least (5) yards from the sideline for the huddle to be legal.
- l) If a receiver illegally touches the ball (steps out of bounds and is the first to touch the ball), it will be an incomplete pass unless he is illegally forced

out of bounds by a defender. In that case, he becomes eligible again once he re-establishes both feet inbounds.

- m) The offensive team may line up in any formation along the line of scrimmage. They do not have to have at least one receiver on each side of the snapper anymore. There is a minimum of 3 players on the LOS, including the snapper. There can be up to 3 players allowed in the backfield, including the QB! If there are 3 in the backfield and another player is in motion at the snap, this is illegal formation and is a live ball penalty.
- n) It is not a penalty if the QB spikes the ball immediately after the snap in the frozen zone when it is under one minute!!!!

14. Overtime Rules (PLAYOFFS ONLY)

- a) The HOME team calls the coin toss in overtime!!!
- b) In all divisions, each team will be given (4) downs to score from the opponent's **10-yard line and is frozen.**
- c) Extra points (standard rule):
 - a. **5 yard line - 1pt. (Run or Pass)**
 - b. **10 yard line - 2 pts. (Run or Pass)**
- d) If the defense intercepts the ball during the 4 downs, the offense forfeits their remaining downs. There is no return of interceptions.
- e) If the score is still tied after 1st shootout, the team that was on defense first will start on offense the next round. It keeps rotating going forward until there is a winner.
- f) On an interception by the defense on the extra point, the ball is dead & the ball goes over to the defensive team. There is **NO** 3pt. return in O.T.
- g) Each team gets one timeout per round.

Scoring:

Touchdown - 6 points

Conversions:

- i) **A team must declare if they are going for 1 pt. or 2 pts. after each touchdown:**
 - a) **1 point from the {5} yard line -- RUN or PASS**
 - b) **2 points from the {10} yard line --- RUN or PASS**
 - c) **The QB may run after the 4 count on extra points!**

Safety - 2 points.

Interception Return for a score on the Conversion – 3 points

EXTRA POINT PENALTY ENFORCEMENT:

- a) **If during the return of an interception on the Extra Point, there is any penalty committed against the ball carrier ONLY, the intercepting team will get one chance from the 10-yard line to be awarded 3 points. PASS ONLY!!!!**
- b) **If a personal foul penalty is away from the ball carrier, it will be enforced on the change of possession.**
- c) **If on an interception, the ball carrier commits a foul in the endzone, it will be enforced on the change of possession, half the distance to the goal. It is not a safety!!!!**

Ejections

If anyone (player, coach, parent) is ejected from a game for any reason, they must the area of the field “sight and sound” before the game can resume. They are subject to be suspended for the NEXT GAME or more. Further suspension may be added pending investigation by league directors. No player, coach or parent can physically or verbally abuse any referee no matter what the situation is!!!

Defensive Penalties

5 yards from the LOS repeat down

- a) Failure to wear proper equipment.
- b) Illegal Contact with the Receiver.
- c) Off-sides/Illegal blitz
- d) Too many men on the field.

5 yards, spot foul, repeat down (Offense has option of taking result of play or 5 yds from spot of foul & repeat down)

- a) Holding the ball carrier.
- b) Stripping or attempting to strip ball.

10-yard, end of play, automatic 1st down

- a) Fighting (Automatic ejection & suspension)
- b) Tripping.
- c) Intentionally grabbing flag off a receiver before the pass is completed
- d) Pushing an opponent out of bounds
- e) Tackling
- f) Unnecessary Roughness
- g) Unsportsmanlike Conduct
- h) Roughing the passer

Spot foul & automatic 1st down

Defensive Pass Interference

***NOTE: THROWING THE FLAG AFTER IT IS PULLED:**

- 1st time: Ref will give a warning
- 2nd time: 5 yd. delay of game penalty on that team
- 3rd time and following: 10-yard unsportsmanlike conduct

Offensive Penalties

5 yards, from the LOS & repeat the down

- a) **Delay of Game**
- b) **Failure to wear proper equipment**
- c) **False Start/Snap Infraction**
- d) **Illegal Formation/Illegal Motion/Offside**
- e) **Too many men on the field**

5 yards, from the LOS & loss of down

- a) **Intentional Grounding (see rule clarification)**
- b) **Running play in the Frozen Zone or QB run when restricted**
- c) **QB runs before the 4 count (2nd-3rd grade) or 5 count (1st grade)**
- d) **QB runs when not blitzed (4th grade and up)**

5 yards spot of the foul & loss of down

- a) **Diving/Sliding - {No Exceptions}.**
- b) **Flag Guarding/Stiff Arming/Holding the flag**
- c) **Hurdling over another player**
- d) **Illegal Forward Pass**
- e) **Illegal Picks**

10 yards spot of foul & loss of down

- a) **Charging into a player**
- b) **Blocking**

10 yards from the LOS & loss of down

- a) **Fighting (Automatic ejection & suspension)**
- b) **Tying on the flag belt (includes EJECTION at head ref's judgement)**
- c) **Unnecessary Roughness**
- d) **Unsportsmanlike Conduct (if this is a dead ball foul, it is not a loss of down)**

10 yards from LOS & repeat down

- a) **Offensive Pass Interference**

Rule Clarifications

- 1. Intentionally grabbing the flag off the receiver before possession**
 - a. If the pass is completed to the receiver whose flag was pulled, 10 yards will be added to the end of the play and is an automatic 1st down. If the ball is touched or bobbled by the receiver before the pull, this rule does not apply!!!**
 - b. If the flag is pulled from a receiver who did not catch a pass, there is no penalty. However, if that player receives a lateral, then ten yards will be added from that spot, since the play would be blown dead and is an automatic 1st down.**

- 2. Intentional Grounding: Can only occur when the Q.B. is in imminent danger of being sacked and tosses, flips, or spikes the ball to avoid a sack and the ball does not go beyond the line of scrimmage. The pass must be a forward thrown pass that goes beyond the line of scrimmage. It is not considered intentional grounding if the QB spikes the ball IMMEDIATELY after taking the snap to stop the clock.**

- 3. The 1st down marker**
 - a. If the offense passes the first down marker and, during the play, commits a “LIVE” ball foul that brings the ball back behind the 1st down marker, they can still gain a 1st down.**
 - b. If the offense passes the first down marker and, after the play, commits a “DEAD” ball foul that brings the ball back behind the 1st down marker, they cannot gain another 1st down.**

- 4. Declaring On 4th down: The offensive team has until the end of the play clock (30 seconds) to make a choice on whether to punt or go for it. The play clock will not reset if they decide to go for it. The clock will not stop unless the defense calls a timeout, the offense chooses to punt (if under 1 minute), the offense calls a timeout, a delay of game or the 1-minute warning occurs. At change of possession under 1 minute, the clock stops & will start again on the snap. If the offense elects to change their decision, they must use a timeout.**

- 5. Illegal Forward Pass/Illegal QB Run (Frozen or Restricted): For the QB to be declared illegal to run (frozen or restricted) or pass, his/her entire body must be over the line of scrimmage, not just 1 foot. If the QB does go over the line, the referee will throw the flag but not immediately blow it dead. This will allow the defense a chance to intercept the ball if in fact the QB does throw an illegal forward pass. If the QB continues to run and not pass, it will be blown dead at that point and an illegal run will be called.**

- 6. INADVERTENT WHISTLE: The offense has two options. Take the ball where it was when the whistle was blown or replay the down from the original line of scrimmage.**

- 7. Video Replays: There are no video or camera replays or reviews by officials or Next Level staff. Please do not approach any referee or staff during or**

after the game trying to show them a call. The referees call what they see & a judgement call will not be overturned.

8. **Protests:** All protests must be declared at the time in the game where the challenge on a rule occurs. Once the next play goes off, you may not protest the previous play. You must alert the head ref & explain you are protesting. The referee will take down all info in game at that point: clock, score, timeouts left, reason for protest, & down/distance in the game at that point. The protest will go to the board of directors for review. Only a rule interpretation can be protested, not a judgment call. Once the game is over, no protest can be filed, whether the rule was executed right or wrong. **NO EXCEPTIONS!**
9. **UNTUCKED JERSEY & HOLDING:** If a player has their jersey untucked and a defender accidentally grabs the part of the jersey that should be tucked in when attempting to pull the flag, holding should not be called. However, if a defender does this as an obvious attempt to gain leverage or stop the ball carrier, holding should be called.
1. **THE DIP:** The ball carrier may dip down and step through to avoid a flag pull. This is a legal act in flag football. It is not a flag guard unless the ball carrier uses his hands to ward off the defender while dipping.
1. **PENALTIES INSIDE 1 MINUTE:** When a penalty occurs inside the last minute of either half and the end of the play would normally have the clock running, the offended team will have the option of starting the clock on the next snap or the ready whistle. In this case, the official will stop the clock to present the offended coach with their options and administer the penalty. If the offended team chooses to start the clock on the ready whistle, the official will set the marker, blow the whistle and start the game clock again.

Girls Divisions

The girls' divisions of Next Level will use the same rules above with the following notes/exceptions:

- 1) Drives to start the game/half or following a score will start at the 10 yard line.
- 2) The 1st down will now be every 10 yards. The long judge will mark 10 yards from the LOS with a bean bag
- 3) **Extra Points:**
 - a. 1-point try – RUN or PASS from the 5-yard line (QB is not frozen and may run on the try.
 - b. 2-point try – RUN or PASS from the 10-yard line

- 4) The QB is allowed 1 run on each side of the midfield cone. She does not have to wait until the end of the 4 count to run.**
- 5) The offense must have a minimum of 3 players on the LOS at the snap, including the snapper. They can have 3 in the backfield, including the QB. There is no balanced line required and no requirement for a receiver on both sides of the snapper.**
- 6) The frozen zone is established for the offense when they get to or inside the defense's 5 yard line. All plays when frozen MUST be a forward pass at or beyond the LOS. There are no handoffs or QB runs when frozen.**
- 7) All divisions will now declare on 4th down.**
- 8) Ball size:**
 - a. 2nd-6th – White Next Level Pee-wee Ball**
 - b. 7th/8th – Multi-color Next Level Junior Ball**
- 9) There is no blitzing in any of the divisions.**

PRE-K, K and 1st GRADE DIVISIONS

The Pre-K, K, and 1st grade divisions of Next Level are instructional divisions. NO SCORES OR STANDINGS ARE KEPT! Please note the following rules:

PRE-K and Kindergarten Divisions

- a) The coach will be the quarterback for the entire game. The coach must hand off or pass the ball before the 5 second count or the play is over.**
- b) There is only 1 fake allowed on handoffs. There is no hiding the ball from the defense to trick them. The official will blow the whistle to stop the play if this happens.**
- c) No pass by the coach should be thrown more than 15 yards.**
- d) Timing: for both divisions, there will be two 20 minute halves. The offense will possess the ball for 6 plays and then the defense will get 6 plays. The team that starts on offense will start on defense in the 2nd half. No 1-minute warning or pro-clock.**
- e) On offense, there are 6 players on the field along with the coach as QB. (Pre-K division will allow for 7 on 7 with the coach)**

- f) **The defense must line up in a 3-3 zone. The front line must be at least 5 yards off the ball. If the ball is on the defense's 5-yard line or closer to the endzone, the front line can line up on the goal line.**

1ST Grade Division

- a) **The coach or a player can be the quarterback in the 1st half. A player must be the QB in the 2nd half**
- b) **When the coach is QB, the down ends after the 5 count. When the player is QB, the defense may rush in after the 5 count. The QB can also run after the 5 count.**
- c) **No more than 1 fake allowed on handoffs.**
- d) **No pass by the coach can be thrown more than 15 yards.**
- e) **Frozen Zones (designated by blue cones) will be 5 yards from the 1st down and the touchdown. When in the frozen zone, the QB (whether coach or child) must pass the ball. No handoffs are permitted in the frozen zone.**
- f) **The defense must be in a 3-3 zone. The front line must be 5 yards off the ball at the snap. If the ball is on the defense's 5 yard line or closer to the endzone, the front line can line up on the goal line.**
- g) **The game will be played with regular timing rules (24 minute, running clock). It will also have a 1-minute warning and 1 timeout for each team per half. NO PRO CLOCK INSIDE 1 MINUTE!!! The official will stop the clock for the 1-minute warning and start the clock on the next snap.**
- h) **When the coach is QB, the offense will have 6 players. There will be a snapper who will snap to the coach each play.**
- i) **There will be extra point attempts after touchdowns. They can be run or pass (Coach must hand off if a run attempt).**