FLAG FOOTBALL LEAGUES

2026 RULE BOOK

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GAME SETUP AND FLOW CHECK

- 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.
- The winner of the coin toss has the choice of offense or defense. The loser of the coin toss has the choice of direction. There is no option to defer. Teams will automatically switch sides of the field, and the team that started the game with possession will begin the 2nd half on defense.
- The offensive team takes possession of the ball at its 5-yard line and has four (4) downs to cross midfield. Once a team crosses midfield, it has three (3) downs to score a touchdown. **EXCEPT K-1**
- If the offensive team fails to cross midfield after 3rd down and elect to "punt" on 4th down, possession of the ball changes and the opposing team will start a new possession from its own 5-yard line. If the offensive team goes for it on 4th down and does not cross midfield, the opposing team will start a new possession from the spot where 4th down ended.
- Any time there is a 'PUNT or PLAY decision on 4th or 3rd down, the referee WILL ask the offense' Head Coach to declare 'Punt or Play'. The coach MUST make an immediate decision or risk a delay of game penalty.
- **Teams may use a timeout to change the declaration of "Play" at any time prior to the expiration of the play clock.**
- After crossing midfield, if the offense fails to score on 3rd down, the ball changes possession and the new offensive team starts at its 5-yard line
    - ALL AGE GROUPS must be approximately 3 yards off the LOS
    - If inside 3 yards at the GL, defense can line up at the GL
    - **K-1:** 4 downs to get a first (midfield) and 4 downs to score

TERMINOLOGY

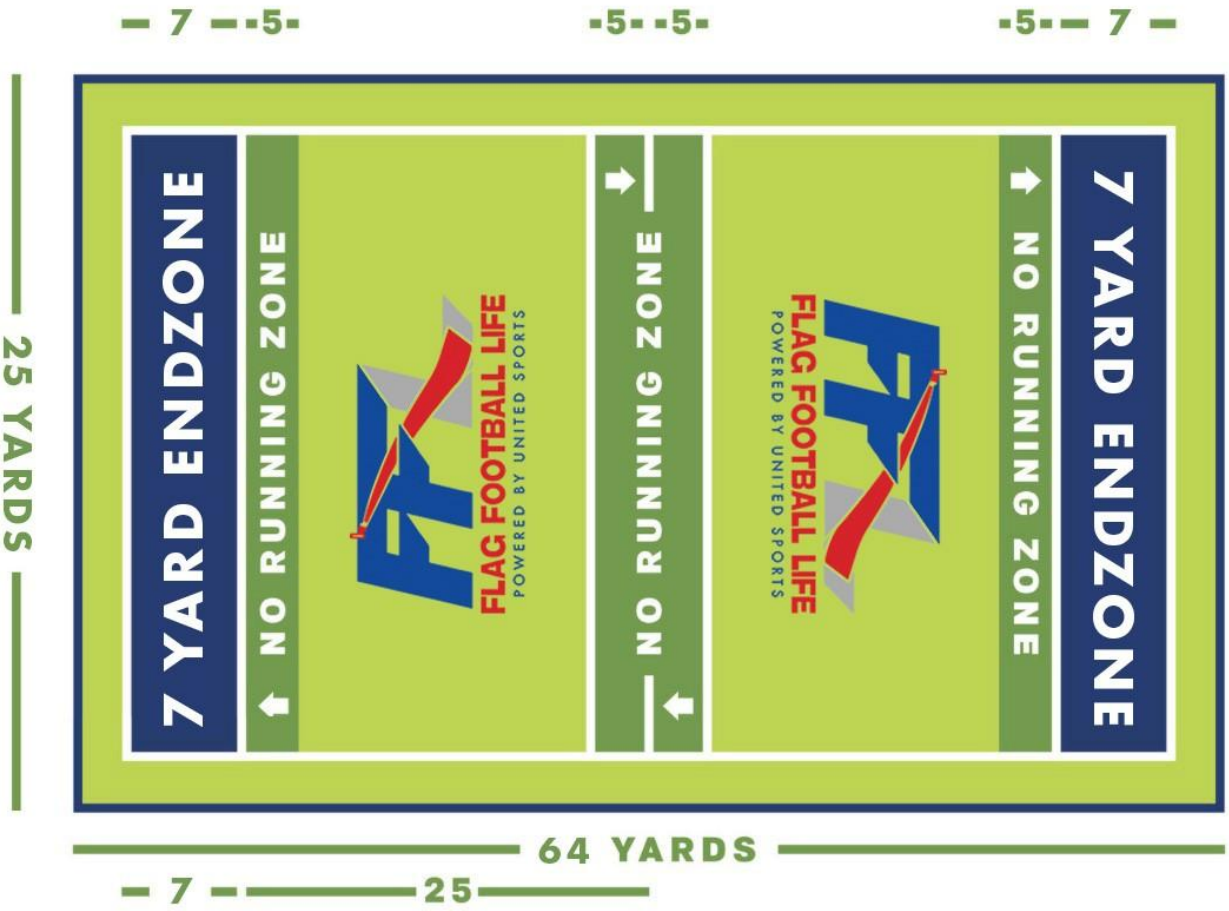
Boundary Lines	The outer lines marking the playing field's perimeter, including sidelines and end zones.
Line of Scrimmage	(LOS) an imaginary line running through the point of the football and across the width of the field.
Line-to-Gain	The yard line the offense must reach for a first down.
Rush Line	An imaginary line 7 yards from the line of scrimmage on the defense's side.
Offense	The team with possession of the ball.
Defense	The team trying to stop the offense and regain possession.
Passer	Any offensive player who throws the ball, not just the quarterback.
Rusher	The defensive player who starts from the rush line and tries to pressure the quarterback by either pulling flags or blocking passes.
Live Ball	Refers to the period of time that the play is in action. Generally used in regard to penalties. Live ball penalties are considered part of the play and must be enforced before the down is considered complete.
Dead Ball	The time between plays when no action is occurring.
Whistle	Official's signal to stop play for timeouts, end of plays, or game periods.
Inadvertent Whistle	An official's whistle that is sounded in error.
Charging	When a ball-carrier illegally runs directly into a set defensive player. This includes leading with the head or making contact with shoulder, forearm, or chest.
Flag Guarding	An illegal act when the ball-carrier tries to block defenders from pulling their flags - whether by stiff-arming, dropping their elbow/head, or using the ball itself as a shield.
Shovel Pass	A legal forward pass across the LOS (Underhand, backhand or by pushing the ball forward).
Lateral	A backward or parallel toss of the ball by the ball-carrier.
Unsportsmanlike Conduct	Confrontational or offensive behavior or language.

EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST

- All players must wear official NFL FLAG belts and flags. All players MUST wear mouth guards at all times while on the field. Game balls should be age specific.
- Players must wear shoes. Cleats may not be allowed at certain locations. This will be specified by your league organizer or site director. However, cleats with exposed metal are never allowed and must be removed.
- 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 must remove all jewelry and hats. Headbands or winter beanies are allowed.
- Players may wear soft shell helmets, halos and sunglasses, but they must be secured at all times while on the field. Prescription glasses are permitted without a strap.
- Players' jerseys must be tucked into shorts or pants, if they hang below the belt line.
- POCKETLESS SHORTS/PANTS ARE A MUST
- Participants must bring their own official NFL FLAG belts and mouth guards to the field. *Extra belts and mouth guards may be available for purchase.*
- NFL FLAG footballs will be provided.
- Flag belts and flags cannot be the same color as the player's shorts or pants.
- **LEAGUE & TOURNAMENT PLAY:** Electronic communication between any player with their coach or spectator for their team is prohibited. If a team or individual is using electronic communication with a player or coach, at any time, that team will be disqualified immediately from play. This does not limit possible additional discipline at the sole discretion of the local league organizer OR NFL FLAG Tournament staff.

FIELD DIMENSIONS AND LAYOUT

- Two standard field size options:
    - Option A: 25 yards wide × 70 yards long with 10-yard endzones
    - Option B: 25 yards wide × 64 yards long with 7-yard endzones
- Field layouts will have a midfield line to gain for a first down. ‘No Run Zones’ are located 5 yards prior to midfield and 5 yards prior to the opponent’s endzone.
- Stepping on the boundary line is considered out of bounds.
- ‘No Run’ Zones are in place to prevent teams from conducting run plays.
    - While in the ‘No Run’ Zones, teams cannot run the ball across the line of scrimmage.
    - All plays must result in a forward pass across the Line of Scrimmage.
- The referee will spot the ball in the middle of the field prior to the ‘Ready to Play’ whistle.
    - The ball may NOT be closer than 10-yards to any sideline



TIMING

- Regular Season Games are played on a 48-minute continuous clock with 2 - 24-minute halves, unless one team gains a 35-point advantage, which will end the game. Teams can agree to continue without changing the score. The clock stops for halftime, injuries and at the Officials' discretion.
- Halftime is 2 minutes.
- (3) 30 second time outs per GAME, 30 second play clock

OVERTIME:

- Home team chooses Offense or Defense first
- Whoever ended 1st overtime on offense begins on offense for 2nd.
- Whoever ended second overtime on offense begins it in the 3rd. Continue to do this
- **1st OVERTIME:** Each team will get one (1) play from the defense's 5-yard line for one point or the defense's 10-yard line for two points. Each team has the choice to go for 1 or 2 points in the first OVERTIME PERIOD ONLY.
- Starting with the 2nd overtime, both teams must attempt a 2 point conversion from the 10-yardline.
- Starting with the 3rd overtime, each team will get 1 play from the 5 yard line going out from the endzone. The team with the most yards will be the winner. The team with the most yards will be awarded 1 point added to their final score.
- The Final Score will be recorded to include all points scored in the overtime periods.
- All regulation period rules and penalties are in effect.
- There are no timeouts in overtime. Each team will be afforded one (1) 'coaches challenge' for the entire overtime session. Challenge MUST be a misapplication of a rule, NOT a judgement call by an official.
- Interceptions are returnable for a score in OT and are worth 2 points.

SCORING GUIDE

- Touchdown: 6 points
- PAT (point after touchdown) 1 point (5-yard line) or 2 points (10-yard line)
    - A 1 point extra point is pass only; 2 point extra point can be a run or pass.
- Interceptions returned for scores during a regulation scrimmage down are worth 6 points. 1 and 2 pt. extra point conversions or overtime interceptions returned are worth 2 points.
- Safety: 2 points
    - A safety occurs when the ball-carrier is declared down in his/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, their knee or arm touches the ground, a fumble occurs in the end zone or if a snapped ball lands in or beyond the end zone.
- A team that scores a touchdown must declare whether it wishes to attempt a 1-point conversion (from the 5-yardline) or a 2-point conversion (from the 10-yard line). 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

COACHING GUIDELINES

- K-1 coaches (1) are allowed on the field during the play. 2-3 AND UP – coaches are allowed on the field to call the play, must be off during it
    - Run safe, organized practices (if you schedule them)
    - Teach fundamentals
    - Model sportsmanship and respect
    - Ensure everyone is getting a fair amount of playing time
    - Communicate with parents about practices and call-outs
    - Positive reinforcement
    - Follow league rules
    - Bring game balls each week
    - I agree to conduct myself in a positive manner toward players, coaches, parents, and officials always
    - Every child should have the opportunity to play
    - I will support and respect staff and officials and refrain from profanity and outward criticism
    - I am responsible for understanding the rules and abide by them
    - I will create a safe and positive environment for my team
    - I will encourage my team to play to the best of their ability and conduct themselves in a positive manner

LIVE BALL/DEAD BALL REGULATIONS

- The ball is live at the snap of the ball and remains live until the official whistles the ball dead.
- The official will indicate the neutral zone and line of scrimmage.
    - It is an automatic dead ball foul if any player on defense or offense enters the neutral zone. The game officials may give teams a “courtesy” neutral zone notification to allow their players to move back behind the line of scrimmage.
- A player who gains possession of the ball in the air is considered in bounds, as long as the first foot or a body part other than the hand, contacts the ground in the field, while maintaining possession.
- Substitutions may be made during any dead ball period.
- The defense may not simulate the offensive team signals by trying to confuse the offensive players, while the quarterback is calling out signals to start the play. Other unfair acts would be; not returning five (5) eligible players to the field of play after halftime, a team or officials' time out prior to the ‘Ready to Play’ signal by the referee. This will result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty on the Head Coach.
- Any official can whistle the play dead. Play is ruled “dead” when:
    - The ball hits the ground.
        - If the ball hits the ground as a result of a snap, backwards pitch or lateral, the ball will be placed where the ball hit the ground.
    - The ball-carrier’s flag is pulled
    - The ball-carrier steps out of bounds.
    - A touchdown, PAT or safety is scored.
    - The ball-carrier’s knee, shin, leg, forearm or arm hits the ground.
    - The ball-carrier’s flag falls out.
    - The receiver catches the ball while in possession of 1 or 0 flag(s).
    - The 7 second pass clock expires.
    - Inadvertent whistle
    - Ball-carrier leaves their feet to dive, jump or hurdle a player.

    - (Exception: A PLAYER CAN DIVE TO CATCH A PASS OR PULL A FLAG)
- **NOTE: Fumbles / loss of possession:** Ground contact must be made for the play to be dead at that spot. A fumble is loss of possession by a player, resulting in the ball contacting the ground.
- If an inadvertent whistle occurs, the team in possession has two options:
    - Take the ball where the whistle blew and the down will count
    - Replay the down from the original line of scrimmage
- If an IW occurs on the last play of the half or game, the offense will be awarded one untimed down and given those two options.
- A team is allowed to use a timeout to question an official's rule interpretation. If the official's ruling is correct, the team will be charged a timeout. If the rule is interpreted incorrectly, the timeout will not be charged and the proper ruling will be enforced.

RUNNING GAME

- The ball is spotted where the ball is when the flag is pulled.
- The quarterback is allowed to run with the ball ONLY when a blitzer crosses the LOS. The quarterback is the offensive player who receives the snap under center directly or in shotgun formation.
- Direct handoffs, pitches, and laterals are permitted behind the line of scrimmage only. If this takes place, after the ball carrier crosses the line of scrimmage, the play is to be blown dead by the official. The ball shall be placed at the spot possession was lost for the next play.
- "Center sneak" play is NOT allowed. The QB may NOT handoff, pitch or lateral the ball first to the center.
- Any player who receives a handoff, backward pass, pitch or lateral can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage.
- Once the ball has been handed off, in front, behind or to the side of the quarterback, or a back-ward pass, pitch or lateral has occurred, the 7-second passing clock is eliminated and all defensive players are eligible to rush.
- Definition of a "Legal Handoff" - Total loss of possession directly from 1 offensive play to another.
- Teams are not allowed to run in the 'NO RUN ZONES' - (Reminder: Each offensive team approaches only TWO no-run zones in each drive – one 5 yards from midfield to gain the first down and one 5 yards from the goal line to score a TD). **EVERY AGE GROUP**
- Runners are not permitted to jump, leap or hurdle, in the officials' judgement, while advancing the ball. The play is to be blown dead and the ball spotted where the jump, leap or hurdle occurred.
- *Ball carriers may leave their feet and the play will continue for spinning, jump cuts, QB's passing or if there is a clear indication that he/she has done so to avoid a collision with another player. The play will continue without stoppage. However, if*

while leaving the ground, illegal contact is made, a penalty may be enforced by the official.

- Offensive players in close proximity of the ball carrier must stop their motion once the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage. No running with the ball carrier.
- 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.
- Once the ball is advanced beyond the LOS, the current ball carrier is the only player allowed to have possession of the ball until the play is dead.

PASSING & RUSHING

PASSING

- Only 1 forward pass, thrown from behind the line of scrimmage, is permitted each offensive play. The ball must be released prior to crossing the line of scrimmage. There can be unlimited backward passes behind the line of scrimmage.
- There is no intentional grounding. The quarterback may throw the ball anywhere across the line of scrimmage to avoid a sack.
- All forward passes that do not cross the line of scrimmage are illegal forward passes, unless touched by a defender. All forward passes must go beyond the line of scrimmage.
- Shovel passes are allowed and must be a forward pass, from behind the line of scrimmage, and received beyond the line of scrimmage.
- The quarterback has a 7 second "pass clock." If a pass is not thrown within 7 seconds, the play is dead, the down counts and the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage. Once the ball is handed off, pitched or lateraled behind the line of scrimmage, the 7 second rule is no longer in effect.
- The countdown for the 7 seconds is 1,2,3,4,5,6, WHISTLE. THE WHISTLE MARKS THE 7 SECONDS. It is not counted as 7 THEN whistle. That would be 8.
- If the QB is standing in the end zone at the end of the 7 second clock, the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage (LOS) and it will be the next down.
- If the quarterback throws the ball and then catches it, the play is dead and treated like an incomplete pass.
- All players are eligible to receive passes (including the quarterback if the ball has been handed off, pitched or lateraled behind the line of scrimmage).
- A player must have at least one foot or other body part in bounds, contacting the ground first with possession.
- In the case of simultaneous possession by both an offensive and defensive player, possession is awarded to the offense.

- Interceptions are returnable. If returned for a score during regular game play, the score will be worth six points, two points if returned during conversions and/or overtime.

RUSHING THE PASSER

- All players who rush the passer must be a minimum of 7 yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped. Up to two (2) players can rush the quarterback. **Rushers MUST identify themselves by raising their hand before the snap.** Rushers MUST rush the passer immediately after the snap. Delayed rush is NOT permitted. Players not rushing the quarterback can defend the line of scrimmage. There is a difference between not rushing and a delayed rush!
- **THERE IS NO BLITZING IN K-1**
- 2-3 AND UP – 1 blitz per set of downs
    - 1 blitz for defense until a first down is made. Once a first down is made, there is 1 blitz remaining for that set of downs
    - If there is a defensive penalty, the offensive team gets a first down, and now the defensive team has a blitz once again for the new set of downs.
- Once the ball is handed off, pitched or lateraled backwards behind the line of scrimmage, all defenders may cross the line of scrimmage to defend and pull the flag.
- A special marker, or the game official, will designate a rush line 7 yards from the line of scrimmage. Defensive players should verify they are in the correct position with the official on every play.
- A legal rush is:
    - Any rush by the 1 or 2 designated rushers, 7 yards from the line of scrimmage.
    - A rush from anywhere on the field AFTER the ball has been handed off, pitched or thrown backwards by the player receiving the snap.
- A penalty may be called if:

  - The rusher leaves the rush line before the snap and crosses the line of scrimmage before a handoff, pitch, lateral or pass – Illegal rush (5-yards from the line of scrimmage and first down).
  - Any defensive player crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped – Encroachment (5-yards from line of scrimmage and first down).
- Any defensive player not lined up at the rush line crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is passed, pitched, lateraled or handed off – Illegal rush (5-yards from the line of scrimmage and first down).
- If the offense draws the identified rusher(s) across the 7 yard marker prior to the snap of the ball, the rusher(s) CANNOT legally rush. Jumping the rush is not a penalty until the rusher crosses the line of scrimmage prior to a handoff, pitch, lateral or forward pass.
- Teams are never required to rush the quarterback with the 7 second clock in effect
- Players rushing the quarterback may attempt to block a pass; however, contact to the QB, unless ruled incidental by the official, would result in a roughing the passer penalty.
- A sack occurs if the quarterback's flags are pulled behind the line of scrimmage. The ball will be spotted where possession of the ball is when the flag is pulled.
  - A 2-point Safety is awarded if a flag pull takes place in the offensive team's end zone.

FLAG PULLING

- A legal flag pull takes place when the ball-carrier is in full possession of the ball.
- Defenders can dive to pull flags but cannot tackle, hold or run through the ball carrier when pulling flags.
- It is illegal to attempt to strip or pull the ball from the ball carrier's possession at any time.
- If a player's flag inadvertently falls off during a play while that player has possession, the player is down immediately and the play ends. The ball is placed where the flag lands.
- If a player who has one or no flags on their belt takes possession of the ball, the play is dead at that spot on the field.
- A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flag(s) off a player who is not in possession of the ball.
- Flag guarding is an attempt by the ball carrier to obstruct the defender's access to the flags by stiff arming, dropping the head, hand, ball, arm or shoulder or intentionally covering the flags with the football jersey

FORMATIONS

- Offenses must have a minimum of one player on the line of scrimmage (the center) and up to four players on the line of scrimmage. The quarterback must be off the line of scrimmage.
- Movement simulating the snap, by a player who is set, is considered a false start.
- The center must snap the ball with a rapid and continuous motion between his/her legs to a player in the backfield, and the ball must completely leave his/her hands.
- **Only one player is allowed in motion when the ball is snapped. The player MUST be in motion, off the line of scrimmage. All motion must be parallel or backwards to the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.
- **Players may shift positions on offense at any time, all players must still reset for 1 second, prior to the snap.

UNSPORTSMANLIKE

- If the field monitor or game officials' witnesses any acts of intentional tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, blocking or any unsportsmanlike act, the game will be stopped and the player will be ejected from the game. The decision is made at the game officials' discretion. No appeals will be considered. INTENTIONAL PHYSICAL PLAY WILL NOT BE PERMITTED!
- Offensive or confrontational language is NOT allowed. Officials have the right to determine offensive language. If offensive or confrontational language occurs, the officials' will penalize for unsportsmanlike conduct and determine if an ejection is warranted.
- Players or Coaches may not physically or verbally abuse any opponent, coach or game official.
- Ball-carriers MUST make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position.
- Defenders must give free releases off the line of scrimmage to offensive players and are not allowed to run through the ball carrier when pulling flags. Offensive players may NOT initiate contact at the line of scrimmage with defenders.

- Fans must also adhere to good sportsmanship as well:
- Fans should cheer on their players only, not harass officials or opposing team.
- Comments must be clean and profanity free.
- Compliment ALL players, not just one child or team.
- Fans are required to keep fields safe and kids friendly and adhere to league requirements for seating:
- Keep younger kids and equipment such as coolers, chairs and tents OFF AND AWAY FROM THE FIELD COMPLETELY. THIS IS FOR EVERYONES SAFETY
- The only time parents/spectators can come onto the field is if they are permitted by the field monitor/onsite coordinator/director.
- Dispose of ALL trash in designated trash cans.

PENALTIES

- The game officials' will administer all penalties.
- The officials will determine incidental contact that may result from the normal run of play.
- All penalties will be assessed from the line of scrimmage, except as noted. (Spot fouls)
- Only the team captain or head coach may ask the referee questions about rule clarification and interpretations.
- Games or halves may not end on a defensive penalty unless the offense declines it.
- Penalties are assessed live ball then dead ball. Live ball penalties must be assessed before play is considered complete.
- Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal yardage when the penalty yardage is more than half the distance to the goal.
- Spot fouls administered in the end zone: Defensive (Ball on one-yard line, first down) / Offensive (Safety)
- **K-3**
    - Flag guarding is not a loss of down the first time on a set of downs.
    - False start is not a loss of down the first time on a set of downs.
    - For extra points: it resets.
    - Flag guard on second and goal, they score. Extra point first attempt they will have 5 yards enforced, not a loss of down. Same for a false start. They will be enforced if committed again.
- **4-12**
    - A loss of down will always be enforced.
- *If a defensive player holds, pushes out of bands, trips or obstructs forward progress and is the last defender between offensive player and the end zone, the play may be ruled a TD at the ref's discretion.
- OFFSETTING PENALTIES REPLAY DOWN

II. Defensive spot fouls

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

III. Offensive spot fouls

Screening or blocking	-5 yards and loss of down
Charging	-5 yards and loss of down
Flag guarding	-5 yards and loss of down
Holding/Illegal Contact	-5 yards and loss of down

Iv. Defensive penalties

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

v. Offensive penalties

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