

TRI SPORTS Football Rules

Revised February 2026

Our Philosophy – We are a sportsmanship-based league, above all else. Our referees will do their very best to have a comprehensive knowledge of the rules, and to hustle to get into the best position to see the play and make the correct calls. Based on the angle or the complexity of the play, our referees, like all football referees, will not see everything on every play. They will call what they see, and their calls are final. Only captains may discuss a rules question/issue with the official. The captain must be a player, playing at least half the snaps in the game. Any other players, friends & family addressing the referees or commenting on their performance may be ejected and/or asked to leave the park. All ejections come with a minimum +1 game suspension (for players) and permanent ban for friends & family. We have a zero-tolerance policy for arguing, foul language, or abusive behaviors towards our staff or between teams. Discussion about possible rules violations between opponents is considered unsportsmanlike and wastes valuable game time. Please play safely and with good spirit and understand, above all else, it's a rec sport & we're all here to have fun.

1. Equipment

- a. TRI SPORTS will supply all equipment. Teams may supply their own regulation-sized (high school sized 11-13 or above) football.
- b. Jerseys must be tucked in, or cut min. 4" higher than waistline. Flags on top of clothing. **Shorts or pants with pockets are NOT allowed, even zippered pockets.** No metal cleats, dangling chains, watches, rings, & jewelry.
- c. Matching Team Color Shirt MUST be worn each week. Flags must be of a color different than color of shorts.
- d. Protective equipment must be of a soft material or be covered and padded so that no hard plastic or metal is exposed.
- e. Music will be provided by TRI SPORTS staff when available. Music brought by players or spectators is not allowed.
- f. Players are expected to clean up after themselves following their game(s). Excessive littering may result in a TD (6pt) penalty the following week.

2. The Game, Field, and Players & Substitutes

- a. Game is played 7-on-7. In co-ed, a team can have a maximum of 5 men playing on the field at any time. 6 players (min. 1 female for coed) are required to avoid forfeit. Coed teams with only 1 female must play with 6 players. Scheduled game time, plus 10 min. is deadline to avoid a forfeit. Game clock starts even if teams are waiting for their players to arrive. We owe it to our later games to finish our early games on time.
- b. SUBSTITUTES are allowed in the regular season, but must be legally registered players, either on the roster of another team or [register for a \\$10 1-day guest pass](#). PLAYOFFS- players must be on that team's roster and play in a minimum of 1 regular season game to be eligible to play in the playoffs. No subs. No exceptions.
- c. Field is roughly 60 yards by 35 yards with 5-yard endzones.

- d. **No Contact.** A defensive player may not hold, push, obstruct, or knock down an offensive player in an attempt to impede their progress or remove the flag belt. Offensive players may not block, hold, pick, or otherwise obstruct defensive players. On a kick return, non-ball carriers are expected to stand still (if in front) or run behind the ball carrier & make themselves available for the lateral; players may not lead the way/run in front of the ball carrier in order to block or obstruct. Blocking during a play will result in an offensive blocking penalty being assessed. Defenders should take angles of pursuit on the flag belts, not the ball carrier. Offensive players should not run with their head down, in an attempt to run through the defenders. ALL players are responsible for making a reasonable effort to avoid contact, regardless of whether or not they may be “playing the ball”. **A player should never be run over. Violators will be flagged for unnecessary roughness and may be ejected from the game or the league due to a severe infraction and/or repeated violations.**
- e. All teams make the playoffs and seeding is based on head-to-head results & opponent’s records. There is NO benefit to beating a team by maximum points.
- f. Rock-Paper-Scissors decides possession & direction to start the game. Winner gets choice of starting with the ball in either half, or direction. There are no kick-offs. Ball starts on the 10 yd line. In playoffs, higher seed chooses.

3. Game Clock, Periods, and Time Factors

- a. Game clock starts on time OR 3 mins. after the last play of the previous game; whichever comes first. Have your team ready to go on the sideline in order to maximize playing time as the clock will start on time, ready or not.
- b. Games are comprised of (2) 20-min. halves & a 2 min. halftime. Running clock is used for the entire first half & for the first 18 mins. of the 2nd half. If a men’s team is up by 10 or more points at any time, the game shifts to a running clock. If a co-ed team is up by 11 or more points at any time, the game shifts to a running clock. Clock will stop (until snapped) for timeouts, dead balls, incomplete passes, out of bounds, touchdowns, extra point conversions, offensive delay of game, offensive offside, defensive penalties, and on 1st downs until the ball is spotted. Penalties during stop clock may be declined and the clock will restart on the ready for play as determined by the officials.
- c. Timeouts: Teams may call one, 30-second timeout per half. Timeouts do not carry over at the half.

- d. Kneel-Downs: The game will be declared over if the winning team gets a 1st down with a) 2 mins. or less in the 2nd half & the losing team does not have a time out, or b) 1:30 or less in the 2nd half.
- e. Tie Games. In the regular season, ties can result. In playoffs, college football OT rules. Ball spotted at midfield. Teams are required to go for a min. of 2 pt. conversion starting in the third OT.
- f. **Delays.** Failure to snap within 30 seconds after the official signals ready for play is Delay Of Game (5yd penalty). The referee will let teams know when 10 seconds remain on the play clock. *2 Consecutive Delay of Game Penalties results in turnover to opponent.* Punters have 5 sec. from snap to kick. **Failure results in immediate turnover to opponent.**

4. Dead Ball Results When:

- a. Any part of the runner other than a hand(s) or foot touches the ground.
- b. A passer/runner has a flag belt removed legally or runs out of bounds. A player only needs 1 foot in bounds to make a legal catch (college rules).
- c. A runner is legally tagged with one hand between the shoulders and knees, including the hand and arm, if their flag is missing or has fallen off prior to being touched by the defense.

d. The football touches the ground for any reason (punts, fumbles, bad snap, handoffs, etc). The ball is dead at that point. In the case of dropped laterals, the defense can choose to accept where the ball hits or forward progress.

e. The ball carrier launches off both feet/jumps to advance the ball **forward** (i.e. diving). Players can jump to catch a ball but once in possession they can't leave their feet to advance it. Lateral side-hopping/backward back-hopping are fine.

Spinning is allowed as of 2025, however spinning into, or through, a defender you wouldn't have otherwise may result in an unnecessary roughness penalty on the offense.

5. Series of Downs, Girl Plays, and First Downs

a. The offensive team has 1 set (4 downs) to cross the mid-field marker & 1 more set of 4 downs to score.

b. In co-ed Girl plays required once every set (4 downs); resets with a 1st down. A girl play is a legitimate attempt to advance the ball by a girl: girl must attempt a forward pass, be the sole rusher or intended receiver (in the opinion of the official).

c. The female may not lateral the ball unless she has gained positive yardage first (either by catching a forward pass or rushing). This prevents a female from lateralling backwards to a male who then throws a forward pass.

d. Coed "open" or "closed" status - The term "open" means the girl play requirement has been satisfied for this set of downs. The term "closed" means the offensive team has yet to run a girl play. Resets with a 1st down.

6. Punting

a. Offensive team may punt on 4th down & MUST notify the defense. Offensive players cannot cross the line of scrimmage until the ball is kicked (5-yard penalty).

b. Punter has 5 seconds (from snap) to kick the ball. Failure results in immediate turnover to defense.

c. If the ball is kicked through the end zone on a punt (or kicked into the end zone & the receiving team elects not to run the ball out), the offensive team will start their drive at the 10-yard line. If the receiving team opts to catch the ball outside their end zone and runs back into their end zone, the receiver is in-play & runs the risk of being tackled in their own end zone (result is a safety).

d. If a punt goes out of bounds before the endzone, ball is spotted where it went out of bounds.

7. Snapping the Ball/Pre-Snap

a. Offensive players are responsible for retrieving the ball after an offensive play.

b. Offense must have a minimum of (3) players on the line of scrimmage (center plus (2) additional players).

c. Prior to the Snap, one offensive player may be in motion, but not in motion toward the opponent's goal line at the snap. Other offensive players must be stationary in their position.

*Penalty: **Illegal Motion, 5 yards.***

d. The rush count is 5 seconds [for coed] or 6 seconds [for men's]. One defensive player must call out the rush count loudly so that the officials and opposing quarterback can clearly hear it. The rush count must be: "1- Mississippi, 2-Mississippi, 3—Mississippi, 4—Mississippi, 5-Mississippi (, 6-Mississippi)". While counting, the defense must remain behind the line of scrimmage. A defensive player crossing line early results in a **Defensive Offside Penalty of 5 yards.**

e. The quarterback may only run WHEN, AND IF the rusher crosses the line of scrimmage. No running if the defense doesn't cross the line of scrimmage. A Quarterback rushing prior to the Defense crossing the line of scrimmage will be assessed an Offensive Offside Penalty of 5 yards and loss of down.

f. Hand-offs are not allowed. The ball must fully exit the quarterback's possession before entering possession of another player. Running a "read-option" type of action is allowed, but the ball must be passed through the air, forward or backward, rather than directly handed off.

8. Touchdowns and Conversions

a. Touchdowns are worth 6 points.

b. NEW IN 2026: A touchdown scored by a female player is worth 7pts. (The female player must be the one to cross the goal line for a 7pt score, a TD pass thrown by a female player to a male receiver is still worth the standard 6pts).

c. Conversion Try = 1, 2 or 3 points. The play clock will be used for all conversions, stop clock or not.

i. 1 point from the 3 yard line, 2 points from the 10 yard line, or 3 points from 20 yards away.

ii. If defense intercepts during a conversion, the ball may be returned to the opposite endzone for 2 pts.

9. Safety

Downing the QB (or any ball carrier) in the endzone results in a safety (2 pts. & turnover to defense).

10. . Guarding/Grabbing the Flag Belt

a. Runner shall not use their hands, arms, or the ball to prevent an opponent from pulling their flag. This includes lowering the shoulders causing their arm/elbow to cover the flag. *Penalty: Spot foul; play is dead at the spot.*

b. No extending of the arm (stiff arm) to disrupt a flag pull attempt. *Penalty: Personal Foul, 10 yards.*

c. The defensive player shall not pull the shirt, hold, grasp, or obstruct the forward progress of a runner when in the act of removing the flag belt or making a legal tag. *Penalty: Defensive Holding, 5 yards.*

11. . Flag Removal

a. When the flag is pulled, the ball carrier is down. Forward progress is determined by forward-most point of the hips at time of pull; NOT the BALL. Players removing the flag should hand it back to the ball carrier (sportsmanship).

b. Players should always take angles of attack toward the opponent's flag belt rather than their body, and should always target the flags nearest to them rather than reaching across the opponent's body for the flag on the opposite side (i.e. "wrapping them up"). If forcible contact is created by reaching across an opponent's body, even if the intention is to "play the flags," an illegal contact foul may be assessed.

c. If a flag is missing or has fallen off, the ball carrier may be downed with a 1-hand touch between the shoulders & knees.

d. Players must have possession of the ball before they can be downed. If a flag is pulled early, play should continue with the option of the penalty or the result of the play. *Penalty: Personal Foul, 10 yards from spot*

12. . Stripping the Ball/Attempt to steal the ball

A player is not allowed to strip or attempt to strip the ball from a player *in possession* (ref's discretion), including but not limited to: punching, striking or stealing a held ball. **Penalty: Personal Foul, 10 yards from original spot and replay down, or 10 yards from the result of the play.**

13. **SPORTSMANSHIP**- Sportsmanship is the #1 priority in this league. As a general rule, it is fully expected that the tackler (flag puller) will politely hand the ball carrier's flags back to him/her.

14. **Penalties/Discrepancies**

- Penalty yardage assessed will be the specified distance or half the distance to the goal; whichever is less.
- Defensive penalty (during stop clock) stops the clock. Offense may elect to decline the stoppage.
- Blocking (offensive): Dead ball at the spot of the foul.
- Blocking (defensive): 5yd penalty & replay down. Offense may decline & instead take the result of the play.
- Offside (defense)/early rush: 5yd penalty & replay down. Offense may decline & instead take the result of the play.
- Offside (offensive)- Dead ball. A 5-yard penalty & replay down. If less than 2 mins. remain in the game, a 10 sec. run off will occur before the offense can snap the ball, unless they take a time-out to stop the clock.
- Illegal QB Rush/QB crosses line of scrimmage before defense crosses: see rule 7f. 5yd penalty, loss of down.
- False Start: Dead ball, 5yd penalty& replay down.
- Unnecessary Roughness (defensive): 10yd penalty & automatic 1st down, penalty may be assessed from the original spot or the result of the play, offense's choice.
- Unnecessary Roughness (offensive): 10yd penalty & loss of down
- Pass Interference (defensive): Spot foul & auto 1st down. If occurs in the end zone, ball is placed on the 1yd line.
- Pass Interference (offensive): 10yd penalty & loss of down.
- Flag Guarding- See rule 10a. Dead ball at the spot of the foul, the down counts.
- Stiff Arm (w/ forcible contact)- See rule 10b. Dead ball & 10yd penalty from the spot of the foul, the down counts.
- Delay of Game: Failure to snap the ball prior to expiration of the play clock (or failure to punt the ball in the allotted 5 seconds) results in a 5yd penalty & replay down. If this occurs during stop-clock and the clock is running at the time of the foul, the clock will stop and restarts on the snap.
- Illegal Motion: see rule 7b. Dead ball, 5yd penalty & replay down.
- Roughing the Passer: ANY forcible contact on the quarterback while attempting a pass, regardless of whether the defender made contact with the ball. QBs losing their flags during the play must be touched to be downed; this should not be forcible or to the throwing arm mid-throw. 10yd penalty & automatic 1st down.
- Early Flag Pull: A defender pulls the flag of an offensive player before they have possession of the ball. Personal foul, 10yds from the spot of the foul. Offense may decline & instead take the result of the play.
- Jumping: a ball carrier may not leave his or her feet to advance the ball forward. Dead ball at the spot.
- Stripping: See rule 12. Personal Foul, 10 yards from original spot & replay down, or 10 yds from the result of the play.

- Illegal Contact (defensive): 5 yd penalty from the original spot & replay down, or 5 yd penalty from the result of the play, offense's choice
- Illegal Contact (offensive): 5 yd penalty from the original spot, loss of down
- Illegal Forward Pass: 5 yd penalty from the spot of the foul, down counts