

Flag Football Official Rules

Special Olympics
Michigan



Events Offered



- Traditional Team
- Unified Team
- Individual Skills Competitions

Rosters – Tradition Teams



- Roster Minimum: 6
- Roster Maximum: 10
- Teams must have five (5) players to start the game. They may continue with a minimum of four (4) players, if necessary, due to disqualification or injury.



Rosters – Unified Sports Teams



- Roster Minimum: 7
- Roster Maximum: 10
- The roster shall contain a proportionate number of athletes and partners.
- Teams must have five (5) players to start the game. They may continue with a minimum of four (4) players, if necessary, due to disqualification or injury.
- The line-up shall never exceed three (3) Athletes and two (2) Unified Partners at any time.
- Failure to adhere to the required ratio results in forfeit

Rosters – Unified Sports Teams



- Each team shall have an adult non-playing coach responsible for the line-up and conduct of the team during competition.
- Unified Partners playing quarterback may NOT pass to another Unified Partner.
- Unified Partners MAY handoff to another Unified Partner.
- Unified Partners shall NOT dominate play.

General Rules



- Special Olympics Flag Football is non-contact
- Teams will be grouped into divisions based on team type, game scores submitted and TEQs.



Points of Emphasis



- No team shall repeatedly commit penalties/fouls which halve the distance to the goal line.
- Neither team shall commit any act which, in the opinion of the referee, tends to make a travesty of the game. This includes intentionally committing penalties/fouls to gain an advantage
- The referee will enforce any penalty he/she considers equitable, including the award of a score for an unfair act.

Uniforms



- All participants must have a playing uniform consisting of matching shirts and shorts/pants.
- Numbers should be on both the front and back of the jersey.
- Jerseys must be tucked in at the waist to avoid obstruction of Flag Pulling
- All players must wear athletic shorts without pockets
- Shorts/Pants must be of contrasting color to the flags
- Players must wear rubber-cleated or flat-soled athletic shoes. Metal spikes are illegal.

Uniforms



- No jewelry may be worn (rings, bracelets, earrings, etc.).
- No blue jeans or denim will be allowed.
- Athletes should not wear hats, bandanas, or any other form of headwear.
- Sports style headbands are permissible
- Any athlete with a medical condition or religious head covering must notify Games Officials at registration.

Equipment

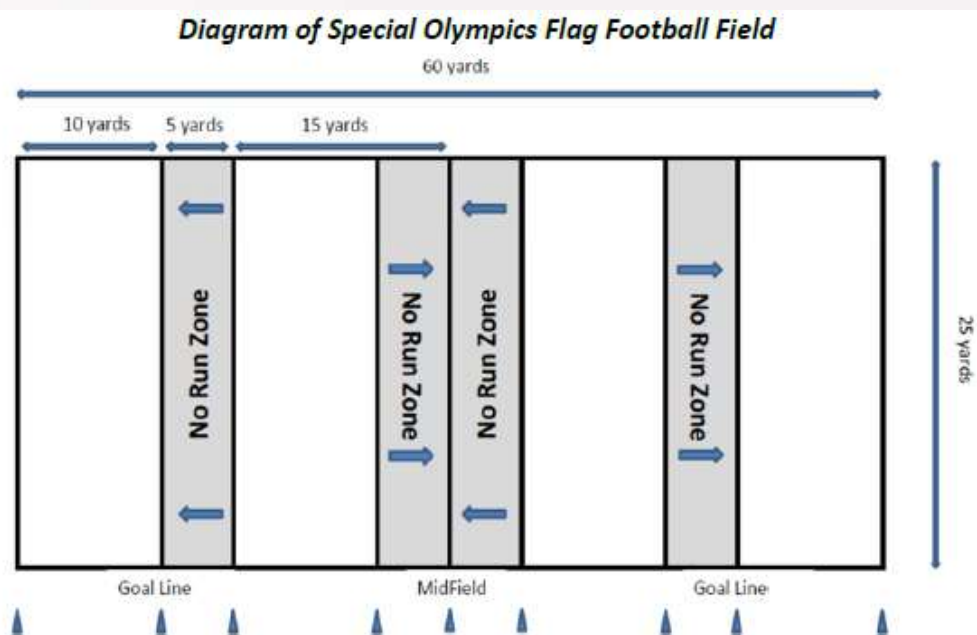


- A regular or intermediate (youth) size football will be used in all divisions
- Players will wear a one-piece flag belt with three flags.
 - Flags should be placed one on each hip and one on the backside.
- A protective mouthpiece must be worn at all times



Playing Field

- A flag football field is 60 yards long (including the end zones) and 25 yards wide. End Zones are 10 yards long each, meaning the playing field is 40 yards long with midfield being the 20-yard line.
- Stepping on a boundary line is considered out of bounds.



Playing Field



- No-Run Zones are in place to prevent teams from conducting power run plays. While in the No-Run Zones (a 5-yard zone before midfield and before the end zone), teams cannot run the ball in any fashion. All plays must be passing plays.
- A space of at least 5 yards around the field must be free and clear of obstructions. The field can be marked with chalk, paint, and/or traffic cones.

Timing



- The game consists of two (2) 20-minute halves with a running game clock. There is a 5-minute halftime break.
- Officials can stop the clock at their own discretion (injuries, delays).
- There is a 30-second play clock. This clock starts at the end of the previous play.
- Each team receives two (2) 60-second time-out per game.
- The clock will stop on all time-outs.

Timing



- The ball must be put in play promptly and legally and any action or lack of action by either team that tends to prevent this is considered delay of game.
- This includes
 - Interrupting the 30-second count for any reason except for a granted timeout.
 - Consuming more than 30-seconds to snap the ball after it is ready for play.
 - Failing to remove an injured player for whose benefit an excess timeout has been granted.
 - Deliberately advancing the ball after it had been declared dead.

Overtime



- If the score is tied at the end of regulation play the game moves to overtime.
- A coin toss is held to determine first possession.
- Each team receives two (2) plays from midfield and the team gaining the most points or gaining a yardage advantage is awarded one (1) extra point and wins the game.

Overtime



- Exceptions to this rule are as follows:
 - If the team with the first attempt in overtime scores on the first play, the opposing team must score on its first play also. If both teams score a touchdown, or gain the same yardage, the procedure is repeated until one (1) team wins.
 - Interception: the team that intercepts the pass automatically wins the game.

Scoring



- **Touchdown:** six (6) points
- **Extra Point:** one (1) point from the 6-yard line, two (2) points from the 12-yard line.
- **Safety:** two (2) points

Coin Toss



- A coin toss will be held to determine the games first possession
- The officials and two (2) team captains will meet three (3) minutes prior to the start of the game at midfield to conduct the coin toss.
- The winner of the coin toss will choose offense, defense, or end of field to defend. The team winning the coin toss may defer its choice to the second half.

Possessions



- There are no kick-offs, all possessions start at the offensive team's 5-yard line.
- Exception: Following an interception, the ball will be placed at the spot where the play ends.
 - An interception in the end zone, with the call carrier having their flag pulled, while still in the endzone, will result in a touchback with the intercepting team taking over possession at their own 5-yard line.
- The offense has four (4) plays to cross mid-field
- Once the offense crosses mid-field, they have four (4) additional plays to score a touchdown.

Possessions



- If the offensive team fails to cross mid-field or score a touchdown in the prescribed number of plays, possession of the ball changes and the opposing team starts at their 5-yard line.
- The ball is marked at the spot where the position of the ball is when the player is declared down.
- The ball carrier may not dive, hurdle, stiff arm or use either arm to shield a defender from grasping his/her flag

Formations



- **Line of Scrimmage**

- The line of scrimmage for each team is a vertical plane through the point of the ball nearest the team's goal line.
- Each player on a team must be on its side of the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.

- **Snap**

- A snap is the legal act of passing the ball through the Center's legs from the ground to the QB to start a play. This can either be a direct snap or a shotgun snap.

Formations



- Motion
 - Only one player of the offensive team may be in motion, or moving laterally, at the snap.
 - This player must be behind the QB and not moving toward its goal line at the time the ball is snapped. This player may only move laterally along the line of scrimmage.
 - If the player comes to a stop, he/she must be set for one (1) second.

Formations



- **Shift**
 - A shift is the action of one (1) or more offensive players who after taking set positions move to a new position prior to the snap.
 - A player who shifts must reset for one (1) second prior to the snap.

Substitutions



- Any player on the roster may enter upon the completion of a play or a dead ball.
- Each substitute must play at least one (1) down prior to being replaced
- A replaced player must leave the field immediately
- In Unified game play Athletes must sub for Athletes; Unified Partners must sub for Unified Partners

Live Ball/Dead Ball



- Positions/Snap

- The ball must be snapped between the Center's legs to start each play.
- If the snap is dropped and the ball hits the ground the play is over.
- No minimum number of players is required to line-up on the line of scrimmage.



Live Ball/Dead Ball



- A play is ruled dead when:
 - The ball carrier's flag is pulled;
 - The ball carrier loses his/her flag;
 - The ball carrier steps out of bounds;
 - Any part of the ball carrier's body, other than the feet or hands touches the ground.
 - When in possession of a player, the ball is considered an extension of the hand.
 - A touchdown, extra point, or safety is scored;
 - When during a try-for-point the defense obtains possession of the ball;

Live Ball/Dead Ball



- A play is ruled dead when: (cont.)
 - When a forward pass strikes the ground or is caught simultaneously by the opposing players (the offense retains possession);
 - A snapped ball touches the ground
 - A receiver catches a ball without his/her flags attached;
 - False Start
 - No member of the offensive team may simulate the start of the play before the ball is snapped.

Live Ball/Dead Ball



- When there is an inadvertent whistle.
 - In case of an inadvertent whistle, the team in possession of the ball may choose to accept the result of the play at the point where the play was blown dead or choose to re-play the down.

Fumbles



- There are no fumbles
 - If the ball is fumbled the play is over and the offense retains possession of the ball at the spot of the fumble.
 - If fumbled forward, the ball is spotted where the ball carrier's feet were at the time of the fumble. If ball falls backwards, it is marked where it hits the ground;

Flag Pulling



- A legal flag pull takes place when the ball carrier is in full possession of the ball.
- It is illegal to pull or strip the ball from the carrier's possession at any time. Will result in a penalty.
- If a player's flag belt inadvertently falls off during the play, the player is down immediately upon possession of the ball and the play ends.
- A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off a player who is not in possession of the ball. Will result in a penalty.

Flag Pulling



- Flag Guarding/Shielding is an illegal attempt by the carrier to obstruct the defense's access to the flags by stiff arming, dropping the head or shoulder, or intentionally covering the flags with the football jersey.



Running



- Handoff
 - A handoff is transferring possession of the ball from one teammate to another without throwing or kicking it.
 - All handoffs must be direct handoffs
 - No forward hand-offs are allowed (illegal pass)
 - Laterals and pitches are illegal.

Running



- In Unified divisions, a Unified Partner may handoff to a Unified Partner.
- The player who takes a hand-off can pass the ball, as long as he/she does not pass the line of scrimmage.
- The Quarterback (first player gaining possession of the snap) cannot advance the ball across the line of scrimmage.
- The ball is marked at the spot where the position of the ball is when the player is declared down (carrier's flag belt is pulled or hand/knee touches ground).

Running



- The ball carrier may not dive, hurdle, stiff arm or use either arm to shield a defender from grasping their flag.
- Shielding (Flag Guarding) – Runners shall not shield (flag guard) by using their hands, arms, or the ball to deny the opportunity for an opponent to pull or remove their flag belt.
- This includes
 - Swinging the hand or arm over the flag belt
 - Stiff arms
 - Placing the ball in a possession over the flag belt
 - Lowering shoulders or arm over the flag belt
 - Hurdling

Passing/Receiving



- All passes must be forward and received beyond the line of scrimmage.
- Shovel passes are allowed but must be received beyond the line of scrimmage.
- All players are eligible to receive a forward pass, including the Quarterback, if he/she has legally handed the ball off.
- Exception in Unified Sports divisions, Unified Partners are not allowed to throw to other Unified Partners, their passes must be thrown to Athletes.

Passing/Receiving



- A player must have at least one (1) foot in bounds when making a catch.
- Interceptions may be returned for positive yardage by the intercepting player.
- Diving
 - A defensive or offensive player may dive to catch a pass.
 - Diving is illegal when used to down a player (pull their flag) or advance the ball.
 - A player cannot dive in an attempt to gain extra yardage.
 - The team will be penalized accordingly

Passing/Receiving



- Eligible Receiver
 - All offensive players are eligible to receive a pass, including quarterbacks after they execute a handoff.
 - Exception: In Unified Sports divisions Unified Partners are ineligible when Unified Partners are throwing the pass.
 - Unified Sports teams are expected to comply with this rule without intervention by officials.
 - Failure to “self-patrol” will be considered unsportsmanlike and will be penalized accordingly.

Rushing the Passer



- The player who rushes the QB must be a minimum of 7-yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.
- A special marker, placed by the official, will designate the spot 7-yards from the line of scrimmage
- If a rusher crosses the rush line early, they may return to the rush line, reset, and then legally rush the quarterback.
- Players not rushing the QB may defend the line of scrimmage.
- Once the QB hands off the ball, the 7-yard zone no longer exists, and all defenders are eligible to rush.

Screen Blocking



- Screen Blocking – legally obstructing an opponent without contacting him/her with any part of the screen blocker's body.
- Screen blocking is the only form of legal blocking that can be used by any player at any time.
- The screen blocker shall have his/her arms fully extended to the ground (below the waist) either at his/her side, in front, or behind his/her back. Arms may also be crossed at the chest with hands at the shoulders.
- Any use of arms, elbows, legs, or shoulders to initiate contact during the screen block is illegal.

Screen Blocking



- Screen blocker must give opponent at least one step
- Screen blocker must not initiate contact with opponent
- Screen blocker may not take a position so close to a moving opponent that this opponent cannot avoid contact by stopping or changing directions.
- After the snap of the ball, a blocker may move laterally or backward (2) steps.
- If any of the provisions listed are violated, and contact results, the screener has committed an illegal block

Penalties



- Penalties are called at the sole discretion of the officials.
- Coaches and/or captains have the option of accepting or declining all penalties.
- All penalties are assessed from the line of scrimmage.
- No penalty may take the ball more than half the distance to the offender's goal line.

Penalties



- **Offense: Pre-Snap Penalties**
 - 5-yards from the line of scrimmage and replay down
 - Illegal Motion (more than one (1) player moving at snap, moving forward at snap).
 - Illegal Shift (more than one (1) player moving at the snap without resetting)
 - Offside (in neutral zone at snap, false start)
 - Delay of Game (failing to snap within 30 seconds of ready)

Penalties



- **Offense: Post-Snap Penalties**
 - 5-yards from the line of scrimmage and loss of down
 - Illegal forward/backward pass (pass not completed beyond line of scrimmage; illegal backward pass; Partner to Partner; QB pass beyond line of scrimmage)
 - Illegal Procedure (QB run)
 - Pass Interference (picking or pushing defender)
 - Illegal Contact (holding, blocking, bumping, stiff arming)
 - Flag Guarding (driving, spinning, warding off, hurdling)

Penalties



- **Defense: Pre-Snap Penalties**
 - 5-yards from the line of scrimmage and replay down
 - Offside (in or beyond neutral zone at snap)
 - Delay of Game (disconcerting signals or other illegal action)
- **Defense: Post-Snap Penalties**
 - 5-yards from the line of scrimmage and automatic first down
 - Pass interference
 - Illegal Contact (holding, blocking, bumping, stripping)
 - Illegal flag pull (before receiver has ball)
 - Illegal Rushing (rushing QB inside 7-yard marker)

Unsportsmanlike Conduct



- Offensive Penalty
 - 10-yard penalty and loss of down
- Defensive Penalty
 - 10-yard penalty and automatic first down
- The officials will disqualify any player who participates in rough or unsportsmanlike play.
- During player possession, it is illegal for a defensive player to strip or pull the ball from the ball carrier at any time.

Unsportsmanlike Conduct



- Ball carriers **MUST** make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position.
- Defenders are not allowed to run through the ball carrier when pulling flags.

Individual Skills Contest



- The Individual Skills Contest is designed for lower ability, or new athletes, who have not yet developed the skills necessary to participate meaningfully in team competition and athletes who use a wheelchair. Athletes may not be assisted by coaches. Modifications will be made for athletes who have visual or hearing impairments.
- The athlete's final score is determined by adding together the scores achieved in each of the events. For diagrams and rules for each event please visit [somi.org/sports/sports/flag football.html](http://somi.org/sports/sports/flag%20football.html)

Individual Skills Contest

Run & Catch



Catching: "Run & Catch"

1. Purpose: To measure athlete's ability to catch a football.
2. Equipment: 5 footballs, measuring tape, field paint, cones, or numbered mats to mark catching spots and start/finish lines.
3. Description: A starting line, finish line, quarterback box, and 5 catching spots should be marked/ placed on the field. The catching spots should be marked 1-5 (left to right). (See Figure M)

 - I. The quarterback box should be placed in between the starting and finish line.
 - II. The quarterback box will be 4 yards X 4 yards.
 - III. Catching spots are 1 yard X 1 yard.
 - IV. Catching Boxes 1 & 5 will be 5 yards from the quarterback box.
 - V. Catching Boxes 2 & 4 will be 12 yards from the quarterback box.
 - VI. Catching Box 3 will be 20 yards from the quarterback box.
 - VII. The starting line should be placed on the left side of the quarterback and the finish line should be placed on the right side of the quarterback. Athletes will start to the left of the quarterback and finish on the right side of the quarterback.
 - VIII. Each athlete will begin at the starting line. Once the official quarterback gives the signal, the athlete must run to each catching box (in numerical order), stopping to catch a pass at each spot. Once the ball is completely caught, the athlete drops the ball and goes to the next catching box. Once the last ball is caught, the athlete will sprint through the finish line. If a throw from the QB is deemed inaccurate, athletes will receive an additional throw from the same spot.

4. Scoring: Athletes will receive points for completing catches.
 - I. 2 pts: for a complete catch (clearly caught with both hands)
 - II. 0 pts: if athlete is unable to catch or touch a well-thrown pass.
 - III. Athletes can gain a maximum of 10 points in this drill.
 - IV. Officials will be present to confirm point total.

Figure M – Run, Catch, Throwing & Accuracy



Individual Skills Contest Throw For Accuracy



Throwing for Accuracy

1. Purpose: To measure the athlete's ability to throw a football accurately.
2. Equipment: 5 footballs, measuring tape, field paint, cones, or numbered mats to mark catching spots and start/finish lines.
3. Description: A starting line, finish line, quarterback box, and 5 catching boxes should be marked/ placed on the field. The catching boxes should be marked 1-5 (left to right).
 - I. The quarterback box should be placed in between the starting and finish line.
 - II. The quarterback box should be placed in between the starting and finish line.
 - III. The quarterback box will be 4 yards X 4 yards.
 - IV. Catching spots are 1 yard X 1 yard.
 - V. Catching Boxes 1 & 5 will be 5 yard from the quarterback box.
 - VI. Catching Boxes 2 & 4 will be 12 yards from the quarterback box.
 - VII. Catching Box 3 will be 20 yards from the quarterback box.
- VIII. The starting line should be placed on the left side of the quarterback and the finish line should be placed on the right side of the quarterback.
- IX. The player being tested stands inside of the quarterback box. Five human targets/volunteers are placed in each catching spot. The athlete must throw to each target (in numerical order), gaining points for completed passes. The receiver must stay in the catching box. Scoring is based on accuracy of the throw not on the volunteer catching the pass.
4. Scoring: Athletes will receive points for completed passes.
 - I. 2 pts: For an accurate & completed throw.
 - II. 0 pts: Receiver is unable to catch or touch ball in targeted area. If the ball hits the ground prior to reaching the target, the throw will be recorded as a failed attempt.
 - III. Athletes can gain a maximum of 10 points in this drill.

Figure M – Run, Catch, Throwing & Accuracy



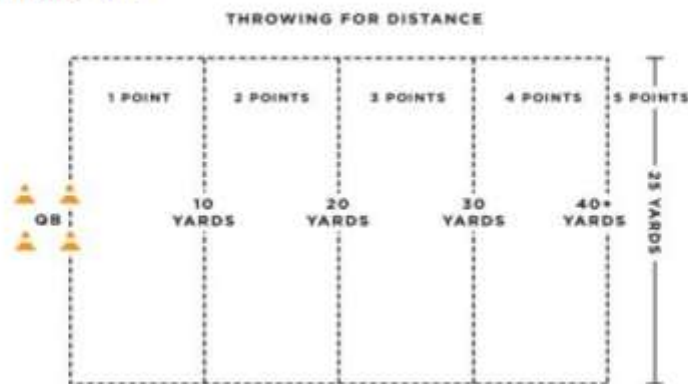
Individual Skills Contest Throw For Distance



Throwing for Distance

1. Purpose: To measure the athlete's ability to throw a football for distance.
2. Equipment: 3-5 footballs; measuring tape; field paint; cones
3. Description: Athlete gets two attempts to throw football as far as possible. The goal line of a Special Olympics flag football field can be used as the starting line. (See Figure M-1)
4. Scoring: Athletes will receive a maximum of 5 points per throw.
 - I. 1 pt: 0-10 yards
 - II. 2 pt: 10-20 yards
 - III. 3 pt: 20-30 yards
 - IV. 4 pts: 30-40 yards
 - V. 5 pts: 40+ yards
 - VI. Athletes can gain a maximum of 10 points in this drill.

Figure M-1



Individual Skills Contest

Speed Hand Off



Agility & Speed: Hand-Off

1. Purpose: To measure the athlete's speed, agility and ability to receive a hand-off.
2. Equipment: 3 footballs, eight cones, field paint, measuring tape, and stop watch
3. Description: The ball is marked at the 20 yard line or 20 yards from the goal line. The quarterback will be position 20 yards from the goal line. Athlete begins 5 yards behind the quarterback and between the cones. (See Figure M-2)
 - I. The quarterback will give the signal and hand the ball off to the athlete.
 - II. The clock will start on the quarterbacks signal.
 - III. The athlete must maneuver around the four cones and sprints to the finish line/end zone between the cones and must maintain possession of the football.
 - IV. Each cone will be 1.25 yards apart
 - V. A fumble at the exchange between the QB and the athlete would be a redo.
 - VI. If an athlete losses control of the ball, the clock continues to run. The athlete can recover the ball. However, if the ball goes outside the 3m lane, the athlete can either pick up the nearest back-up football or recover the errant football to continue the event.
4. Scoring: The athlete will receive two attempts. The athlete can receive a max of 5 points per attempt for a total of 10 points.
 - I. The athlete will be timed from QB's signal to when he/she crosses the finish line between the cones with possession of the football.
 - II. One-second will be added for every missed cone.
 - III. Conversion Chart will indicate score. Athlete can gain a maximum of 10 points.

Figure M-2

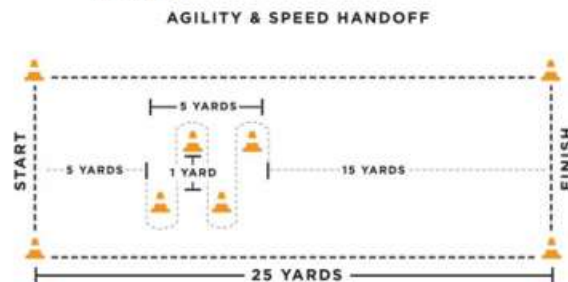


Figure M-3

Agility & Speed: Hand-Off Conversion Chart	
Seconds	Points
Under 7.5 seconds	5
7.5-9	4
9.1-10.5	3
10.5-12.0	2
12.1 and over	1

Individual Skills Contest

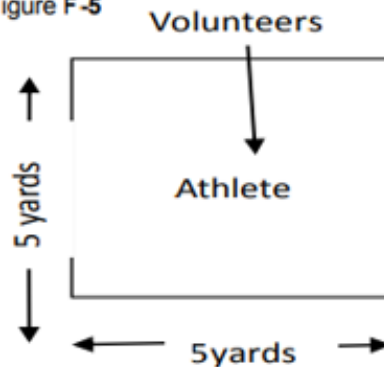
Flag Pulling



Flag Pulling

1. Purpose: To measure the athlete's ability to pull an opponent's flag.
2. Equipment: 5 footballs, four cones, 5 volunteers and measuring tape
3. Description: The athlete stands in the middle of a 5 X 5 yard grid.
 - I. Volunteers will one at a time jog through the grid with a football and attached flags. The athlete attempts to pull the volunteers flag before the volunteer leaves the grid. Volunteers will move straight through the box without attempting to elude athlete. Speed of volunteers will increase incrementally until the last volunteer is sprinting through.
 - II. This is not a timed event. Each additional attempt will not start until the athlete has repositioned themselves at the center of the grid.
4. Scoring: The athlete will receive 5 attempts. The athlete will receive two points for successful flag pull. The athlete will receive one point for any unsuccessful flag pull in which either the flag or ball carrier was touched, but the flag did not come off. The athlete will receive zero points for any unsuccessful flag pull in which the flags or ball carrier are not touched at all. Once the jogging volunteer leaves the grids, he/she must reposition themselves in the center of the grid. Athletes can gain a maximum of 10 points in the drill.

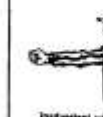
Figure F-5



Referee Signals



FLAG FOOTBALL SIGNALS

 Ball ready for play	 Start clock	 Time-out (Suspensory or injury time out (follow by tapping hands on chest))	 First down	 Touchdown Point(s) after touchdown
 Safety	 Loss of down	 Incomplete forward pass	 Stopped play	 Inadvertent whistle (Face Press Sign)
 End of period	 Encroachment (Offside defense)	 Illegal procedure (False start)	 Illegal shift - 2 hands (Illegal motion - 1 hand)	 Delay of game
 Substitution infraction	 Illegal participation	 Failure to wear required equipment	 Forward pass interference	 Illegal downfield on pass
 Interpersonal grounding	 Personal foul	 Illegal pass (Illegal forward passing)	 Illegal use of hands or arms	 Holding/obstructing
 Unsportsmanlike conduct (Noncontact foul)				 Player disqualification

Terminology



Out of bounds	The outer perimeter line of the field. They include the sidelines and the back of the end.
Line of Scrimmage	(LOS) an imaginary line running through the point of the football and across the width of the field
Rush Line	An imaginary line running across the width of the field 7 yards (into the defensive side) from the line of scrimmage.
Offense	The team with possession of the ball
Defense	The team opposing the offense to prevent them from advancing the ball
Passer	The offensive player that throws the ball and may or may not be the quarterback
Quarterback	The offensive player first receiving possession of the ball. The quarterback may not run the ball.

Terminology



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.
Downs (1,2,3,4)	The offensive squad has 4 attempts or “downs” to advance the ball. They must cross midfield to get another 4 “downs” to score.
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	Refers to the period of time immediately before or after the play.
Whistle	Sound made by an official using the whistle that signals the start/end of play or a stop in the action for a timeout, half time, or the end of the game.

Terminology



Inadvertent Whistle	Official's whistle that is performed in error
Screen Blocking	A legal obstruction of an opponent without contacting him/her with any part of the screen blocker's body.
Shielding (Flag Guarding)	An 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
Shovel Pass	A legal pass attempted beyond the line of scrimmage by throwing the ball underhand or pushing it towards a receiver in a shot put type manner.
Later/Pitch	A BACKWARD PASS of the ball by the ball carrier.

Terminology



Unsportsmanlike Conduct	A rude, confrontational, or offensive behavior or language.
Shift	A shift is the action of one or more offensive players who after taking positions move to a new position prior to the snap.
Defer	Winner of Coin toss is giving the choice to the other team for the first half of the game. The winner of the coin toss gets choice in the second half.
No Run Zones	Areas of the field where teams can only pass the ball.
Center	Player that snaps ball through legs to begin play.