



2023-2024 Rules

NFL FLAG at GATEWAY RULES:

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I. Game

1. At the start of each game, captains from both teams meet at midfield for the coin toss to determine who starts with the ball. The visiting team calls the toss.
2. The winner of the coin toss has the choice of offense or defense. The loser of the coin toss has the choice of direction. Possession changes to start the second half to the team that started the game on defense.
3. The offensive team takes possession of the ball at its 5-yard line and has four (4) downs to cross midfield. Once a team crosses midfield, it has three (3) downs to score a touchdown.
 - a. If the offensive team fails to cross midfield, on 3 downs, and elects to "punt" on 4th down, possession of the ball changes and the opposition starts its drive from its own 5-yard line. If the offensive team goes for it on 4th down and does not cross mid-field, the opposing team will start its possession from the spot.
 - b. Offensive Teams **MUST** declare 4th down intent; "Play or Punt", when asked by the referee and prior to the 'Ready for Play'.
 - c. Teams may use a timeout only to change the declaration of "Play" at any time prior to the expiration of the play clock.
 - d. If the declaration is "Punt" the ball changes possession and will be placed at the opposing Team's 5-yard line, 1st down, with **NO** option to change the declaration.
 - e. If the offense fails to score, after crossing midfield the ball changes possession and the new offensive Team starts at its 5-yard line.
4. Teams change sides after the first half. Possession changes to the team that started the game on defense.
5. **NEW!** In the last 4 minutes of the game, a team can request to do an Onside Play option
 - a. Team must have just scored and still be behind in score
 - b. Ball spotted at 5-yd line
 - c. 1 play to get to a first down at midfield to keep the ball
 - d. If onside play fails defense gets ball at midfield
 - e. If there is a penalty on defense it is enforced and if the spot is short of midfield offense has one additional play to get to midfield and have successful onside play
 - f. With any offensive penalty onside play fails and ball goes to defense at midfield

II. Terminology

Boundary Lines	The outer perimeter lines around the field. They include the sidelines and back of the end zone lines.
Line of Scrimmage	(LOS) an imaginary line running through the point of the football and across the width of the field.
Line-to-Gain	The line the offense must pass to get a first down or score.
Rush Line	An imaginary line running across the width of the field seven 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 it from advancing the ball.
Passer	The offensive player that throws the ball and may or may not be the quarterback.
Rusher	The defensive player assigned to rush the quarterback to prevent him/ her from passing the ball by pulling his/her flags or by blocking the pass.
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 a play.
Whistle	Sound made by an official using a whistle that signifies the end of the play or a stop in the action for a timeout, halftime or the end of the game.
Inadvertent Whistle	Official's whistle that is performed in error.
Charging	An illegal movement of the ball-carrier directly at a defensive player who has established position on the field. This includes lowering the head or initiating contact with a shoulder, forearm or the chest.
Flag Guarding	An illegal act by the ball-carrier to prevent a defender from pulling the ball-carrier's flags by stiff arm, lowering elbow or head or by blocking access to the runner's flags with a hand, arm or ball.
Shovel Pass	A legal forward pass across the LOS underhand, backhand or by pushing the ball forward.
Lateral	A backward or sideway toss of the ball by the ball-carrier.
Unsportsmanlike Conduct	A rude, confrontational or offensive behavior or language.

III. Equipment

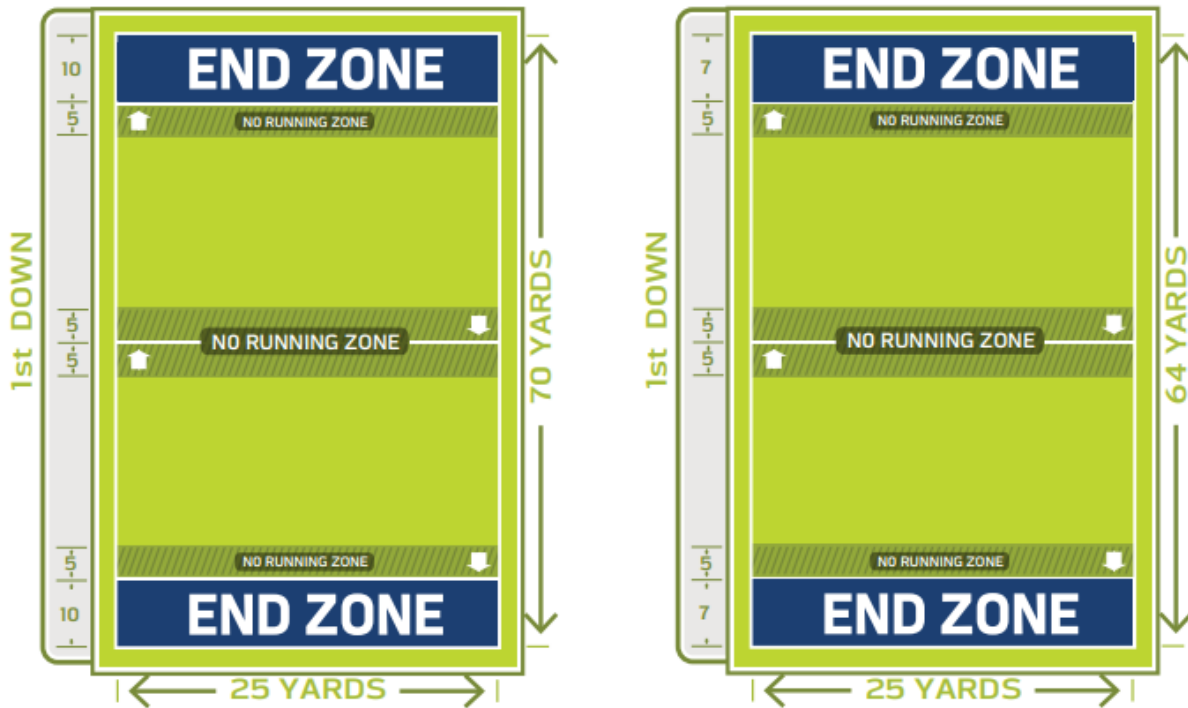
1. All players must wear official NFL FLAG belts and flags. All players MUST wear mouth guards at all times while on the field. Game balls should be age specific.
2. Players must wear shoes. Cleats may not be allowed at certain locations. This will be specified by your league organizer or site director. However, cleats with exposed metal are never allowed and must be removed.
3. Players may tape their forearms, hands and fingers. Players may wear gloves, elbow pads and knee pads. Braces with exposed metals are not allowed.
4. Players must remove all jewelry and hard billed hats. Winter beanies are allowed.
5. Players may wear soft shell helmets and sunglasses but they must be secured at ALL times while on the field.
6. Players' jerseys must be tucked into shorts or pants if they hang below the belt line.
7. We recommend players wear shorts or pants that do not have pockets. Shorts or pants with belt loops or pockets must be taped. Games will not be delayed for a player to tape up pockets.
8. 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.
9. NFL FLAG footballs will be provided. Coaches can use their own football as long as it is the correct size for the age division.
 - a. **Flag belts and flags cannot be the same color as the player's shorts or pants.**

IV. Field

1. The recommended field dimensions are:
 - a. 25 yards wide by 70 yards long with two 10-yard endzones (All Rec divisions and 8U and 10U Pro)
 - b. 100 feet wide by 70 yards long with two 10-yard endzones (14U, 17U, and possibly 12U depending on field availability)
 - c. 100 feet wide by 64 yards long with two 8-yard endzone (when using the front soccer field already lined for soccer)

All with a midfield line to gain. No Run zones are located five yards prior to the line to gain and five yards prior to the endzone in the offense's direction.

2. No-run zones are in place to prevent teams from conducting power run plays. While in the no-run zones (a 5-yard imaginary zone before midfield and before the end zone), teams cannot run the ball in any fashion. All plays must be pass plays, even with a handoff.
3. Stepping on the boundary line is considered out of bounds.
4. **NEW!** Each offensive team approaches only TWO no-run zones in each drive (one zone 5 yards from midfield to gain the first down, and one zone 5 yards from the goal line to score a TD).



V. Timing and Overtime

1. Regular Season Games are played on a 48-minute continuous clock with two 24-minute halves, **NEW!** unless one team gains a 35-point advantage which will end the game unless teams agree to continue without changing the score. The clock stops for halftime, injuries and the Officials' discretion.
2. Halftime is 2 minutes.
3. Each time the ball is spotted, a team has 40 seconds to snap the ball.
4. Each team has three 30-second timeouts per game. They do carry over.
5. Officials can stop the clock at their discretion.
6. In the event of an injury, the clock will stop then restart when the injured player is removed from the field of play.
7. If the score is tied at the end of regulation play, an overtime period will be used to determine the winner. **Overtime format**, when applicable, is as follows:
 - a. The home team calls the toss to determine the team that chooses to be on offense or defense first.
 - i. If a second round of overtime must be played, the team that lost the coin toss will get to choose offense or defense for the start of the second round of overtime. This process continues with teams alternating who gets to choose to be on offense or defense to start out during every round of overtime.
 - ii. The referee will determine which end of the field the overtime will take place on.
 - b. Each team will take turns getting one (1) play from the defense's 5-yard line for one point or the defense's 10-yard line for two points. Whether to go for one or two points is up to the offensive team. Whether or not the team that begins on offense converts, the team that started on defense gets a chance on offense to win or tie by converting a one- or two-point play of their own.

- i. **Example:** Team A starts on offense and chooses to go for one point from the 5-yard line and is successful. Team B is then on offense and can choose to either go for one point from the 5-yard line to tie and force a second round of overtime or to go for two points from the 10-yard line for the win.
 - ii. If the second team on offense in an overtime round fails to beat or match the team that went first, the team that went first wins.
- c. Starting with the 2nd overtime, both teams must "go for two" from the 10-yard line.
- d. 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.
- e. Final Score will be recorded to include all points scored for each team.
- f. All regulation period rules and penalties are in effect.
- g. There are no timeouts.
- h. Interceptions are returnable in OT, and worth 2 points.
 - i. Interceptions returned for a score in the first or second overtime period, the game is over.
 - ii. Interceptions advanced in the third overtime period; the game is over.

VI. Scoring

1. Touchdown: 6 points
2. PAT (point after touchdown) 1 point (5-yard line) or 2 points (10-yard line)
 - a. Note: 1 point PAT is pass only; 2-point PAT can be run or pass.
3. Interceptions returned for scores during regular game play are worth six points, conversions or overtime are worth two points.
4. Safety: 2 points
 - a. 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.
5. A team that scores a touchdown must declare whether it wishes to attempt a 1-point conversion (from the 5-yard line) 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.
6. **NEW!** After one team is winning by 35 points or more, the game is over. TEAMS may elect to continue but no additional points scored will be added.
7. Forfeits are scored 35-0 for the winning team.

VII. Coaches

1. Coaches are expected to adhere to NFL FLAG philosophies, coaching guidelines and code of conduct.
2. Coaches are permitted on the field on offense but must move 5 yards away from any player at the snap. Coaches must move out of the way if the play comes toward them.
 - a. In 5U and below, coaches are permitted on the field on defense.

VIII. Live Ball/Dead Ball

1. The ball is live at the snap of the ball and remains live until the official whistles the ball dead.
2. The official will indicate the neutral zone and line of scrimmage.
 - a. It is an automatic dead ball foul if any player on defense or offense enters the neutral zone. In regard to the neutral zone, the official may give both teams a “courtesy” neutral zone notification to allow their players to move back.
3. A player who gains possession of the ball in the air is considered in bounds as long as the first foot or other body part contacts the ground in the field of play with possession.
4. The defense may not mimic the offensive team signals by trying to confuse the offensive players, while the quarterback is calling out signals to start the play. This will result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty.
5. Substitutions may be made on any dead ball.
6. Any official can whistle the play dead.
7. Play is ruled “dead” when:
 - a. The ball hits the ground.
 - i. If the ball hits the ground as a result of a bad snap, the ball is then placed where the ball hit the ground.
 - b. The ball-carrier’s flag is pulled.
 - c. The ball-carrier steps out of bounds.
 - d. A touchdown, PAT or safety is scored.
 - e. The ball-carrier’s knee or arm hits the ground.
 - f. The ball-carrier’s flag falls out.
 - g. The receiver catches the ball while in possession of one or no flag(s).
 - h. The 7 second pass clock expires.
 - i. Inadvertent whistle NOTE: There are no fumbles, ground contact does not have to be made. If the ball is fumbled forwards, then it will be spotted where the ball carrier lost possession. Loss of possession is a DEAD BALL.
8. If an inadvertent whistle occurs the offense has two options:
 - A) take the ball where the whistle blew and the down is consumed
 - B) replay the down from the original line of scrimmage.If it occurs on the last play of the half or game, the offense will be awarded one untimed down and given those two options.
9. A team is allowed to use a timeout to question an official’s rule interpretation. If the official’s ruling is correct, the team will be charged a timeout. If the rule is interpreted incorrectly, the timeout will not be charged, and the proper ruling will be enforced. Officials should all agree upon any controversial call in order to give each team the full benefit of each call.
10. Officials should all agree in order to change a call on the field that is in dispute.

IX. Running

1. The ball is spotted where the ball is when the flag is pulled.
2. The quarterback cannot directly run with the ball. The quarterback is the offensive player who receives the snap.
3. Handoffs may be in front, behind or to the side of the offensive player but must be behind the line of scrimmage. The offense may use multiple handoffs.
 - a. **“Center sneak” play is no longer allowed. The QB is not allowed to handoff to the center on the first handoff of the play.**
 - b. **Any player who receives a handoff or lateral can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage.**
 - c. **Once the ball has been handed off, in front, behind or to the side of the quarterback, the seven-second passing clock is eliminated, and all defensive players are eligible to rush.**
4. Definition of a “Legal Handoff” - Total loss of possession directly from 1 offensive play to another.
5. **NEW!** No-run Zones are located 5 yards before each end zone and 5 yards on either side of midfield are designed to avoid short-yardage power-running situations. Teams are not allowed to run in these zones if the subsequent line is LIVE. (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).
6. Runners are not permitted to dive or hurdle any player while advancing the ball.
7. **Ball carriers may leave their feet and the play will continue for spinning, jump cuts, QB’s passing progression or if there is a clear indication that he/she has done so to avoid a collision with another player and the play will continue without stoppage. However, if while leaving the ground, contact is made unnecessary roughness penalty may be enforced by the official.**
8. No blocking or “screening” is allowed at any time.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. If the runner's flags are not on the side he is down when a defender touches him with one hand anywhere (first touch).

X. Passing

1. All passes must be thrown with one hand from behind the line of scrimmage, thrown forward and ball out of hand prior to breaching the line of scrimmage.
 - a. There is no intentional grounding.
 - b. The quarterback may throw the ball away to avoid a sack.
2. Shovel passes are allowed.
3. The quarterback has a seven-second “pass clock.” If a pass is not thrown within the seven seconds, the play is dead, the down is consumed and the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage. Once the ball is handed off, the 7-second rule is no longer in effect.
 - a. 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).
 - b. If the quarterback throws the ball and then catches it, the play is dead and treated like an incomplete pass.

XI. Receiving

1. All players are eligible to receive passes (including the quarterback if the ball has been handed off behind the line of scrimmage).
2. Only one player is allowed in motion at a time. All motion must be parallel to the line of scrimmage and no motion is permitted toward the line of scrimmage.
3. A player must have at least one foot or other body part in bounds, contacting the ground first with possession.
4. In the case of simultaneous possession by both an offensive and defensive player, possession is awarded to the offense.
5. 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.
6. Once a forward pass is received, there can be no more handoffs or laterals, even if the pass is caught behind the line of scrimmage.

XII. Rushing the Passer

1. All players who rush the passer must be a minimum of seven yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped. Any number of players can rush the quarterback. Players not rushing the quarterback can defend on the line of scrimmage. **8U and below: Defenders may not rush the passer.**
2. Once the ball is handed off, the seven-yard rule no longer is in effect and all defenders may go behind the line of scrimmage.
3. A special marker, or the referee, will designate a rush line seven yards from the line of scrimmage. Defensive players should verify they are in the correct position with the official on every play.
 - a. A legal rush is:
 - i. Any rush from a point 7-yards from the defensive line of scrimmage.
 - ii. A rush from anywhere on the field AFTER the ball has been handed off by the quarterback.
 - b. A penalty may be called if:
 - i. The rusher is in front of the rush line and the ball is snapped and then crosses the line of scrimmage before a handoff or pass – illegal rush (5-yards from the line of scrimmage and first down).
 - ii. Any defensive player crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped – offsides (5-yards from line of scrimmage and first down).
 - iii. Any defensive player not lined up at the rush line crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is passed or handed off – illegal rush (5-yards from the line of scrimmage and first down).
 - iv. If the offense draws the rusher(s) to jump the seven-yard marker and then snaps the ball, that rusher(s) CANNOT rush during that play. However, any other defender that is seven yards back may rush instead. Jumping the rush is not a penalty until the rusher crosses the line of scrimmage prior to the handoff or passed ball.

- c. Special circumstances:
 - i. Teams are not required to rush the quarterback with the seven second clock in effect.
 - ii. Teams are not required to identify their rusher before the play.
4. 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.
5. The offense cannot impede the rusher in any way. The rusher has the right to a clear path to the quarterback, regardless of where they line up prior to the snap. The PATH is set pre-snap from the rusher or rushers directly to the QB. PATH does not move once the quarterback moves. If the “path or line” is occupied by a moving offensive player, then it is the offense’s responsibility to avoid the rusher. Any disruption to the rusher’s path and/or contact will result in an impeding the rusher penalty. An exception to the rusher’s PATH occurs **if the offensive player does not move after the snap, then it is the rusher’s responsibility to go around the offensive player and to avoid contact.**
6. 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 once the flag is pulled.
 - a. A Safety is awarded if the sack takes place in the offensive team’s end zone.

XIII. Flag Pulling

1. A legal flag pull takes place when the ball-carrier is in full possession of the ball.
2. Defenders can dive to pull flags but cannot tackle, hold or run through the ball-carrier when pulling flags.
3. It is illegal to attempt to strip or pull the ball from the ball-carrier’s possession at any time.
4. If a player's flag inadvertently falls off during a play while that player has possession, the player is down immediately and the play ends. The ball is placed where the flag lands.
5. If a player who has one or no flags in their belt takes possession of the ball, the play is dead at that spot on the field.
6. A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off a player who is not in possession of the ball.
7. 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.

XIV. Formations

1. 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.
 - a. Teams may shift formations prior to the snap as long as they are set for at least 1 second before the ball is snapped.
 - b. One player at a time may go in motion at least 1 yard behind the line of scrimmage.
2. Movement by a player who is set or a player who runs toward the line of scrimmage while in motion is considered a false start.
3. 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.

XV. Unsportsmanlike Conduct

1. If the field monitor or referee 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 referee's discretion. No appeals will be considered. **FOUL PLAY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED!**
2. Offensive or confrontational language is **NOT** allowed. Officials have the right to determine offensive language. If offensive or confrontational language occurs, the officials will determine if a warning or immediate ejection is warranted.
3. Players may not physically or verbally abuse any opponent, coach or official.
4. Ball-carriers **MUST** make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position.
5. 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. **ROUGH PLAY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED**
6. Fans must also adhere to good sportsmanship as well:
 - a. Yell to cheer on your players, not to harass officials or other teams.
 - b. Keep comments clean and profanity free.
 - c. Compliment **ALL** players, not just one child or team.
7. Fans are required to keep fields safe and kids friendly and adhere to league requirements for seating:
 - d. Keep younger kids and equipment such as coolers, chairs and tents a minimum of 10 yards off the field in the end zone area.
 - e. Stay in the one yard minimum off of the fields.
 - f. **Dispose of ALL trash in designated trash cans.**
8. Unsportsmanlike conduct penalties:
 - g. Defense + 10 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
 - h. Offense - 10 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down

XVI. Penalties

1. General

- a. The referee will call all penalties.
- b. Referees determine incidental contact that may result from normal run of play.
- c. All penalties will be assessed from the line of scrimmage, except as noted. (Spot fouls)
- d. Only the team captain or head coach may ask the referee questions about rule clarification and interpretations. Players may not question calls.
- e. Games or halves may not end on a defensive penalty unless the offense declines it.
- f. Penalties are assessed live ball then dead ball. Live ball penalties must be assessed before play is considered complete.
- g. Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal yardage when the penalty yardage is more than half the distance to the goal.
- h. Spot fouls in end zone: Defensive (Ball on one-yard line, first down)/Offensive (Safety)

2. Defensive Spot Fouls

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

3. 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

4. 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-yards)	+5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
Illegal flag pull (before 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	+5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down

5. 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 (Thrower over line)	-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	-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

XVII. Rule Modifications for 8U and Below

These are NFL FLAG recommended and Gateway Flag has adopted these adjustments to the rules that have been proven successful among NFL FLAG Leagues throughout the country.

1. 8U and below
 - a. 'No Run' zones are eliminated. Teams may run anywhere on the field.
 - b. Defenders may NOT rush the passer unless there is a legal handoff executed in the backfield. No 7-yard rush line will be stepped off. Note that there is still a 7 second pass clock though.
2. 5U and below
 - a. One coach for each team is permitted on the field on **defense** to help position their players but **MUST** be 5 yards away from any player prior to the snap of the ball and must stay out of the way of all players if the play comes in their direction.