

Girls Flag Football – NFHS Rules (2026)

1. The Field & Equipment

- Field size: 80 yards long plus 10-yard end zones.
- Ball: NFHS-approved football (recommended to be youth size 7).
- Flags: 3-flag quick release belt, must be worn at waist level, visible outside clothing.
 - Cannot match color of shorts/pants/or any stripe
 - Must be solid color (no words/logos)
 - Players are required to start a play with flags.
 - If the player's flags fall off during the play:
 - If the official deems an action attempting to remove the flag took place within a timely manner of the flag coming off: the runner is down
 - If the flag comes off on its own, with no defender being deemed responsible for removing the flag, then the player must be touched with one hand (between the knees and shoulders)
- Shorts/pants cannot have pockets
- Mouthpieces are required and cannot have any adornments (including "pacifiers" or helmet strap)
- No jewelry allowed. Sunglass permitted only on the face, never on top of the head
- Down box: Shall be placed at the line of scrimmage
- Line of Scrimmage (LOS) is marked by the Down Marker
 - Ball is to be spotted by an official in the middle of the field
 - The Defensive LOS is 1 yard downfield from the Offensive LOS. This creates a 1-yard Neutral Zone. The line of scrimmage official will show this space by his own footing. Defenders should check with the official every play to make sure they are in compliance

2. Game Format

- Players: 7-on-7 is standard (minimum 5 to avoid forfeit).
- Game length: Four 12-minute quarters
 - The Clock will remain running until the last 2 minutes of 2nd & 4th quarter except the following stoppages:
 - Clock will Stop After all Touchdowns
 - Clock will Stop during enforcement of any penalties
 - All Time Outs (Official or Team Timeouts)
 - In the final two minutes of each half, the clock will stop on all Varsity Tackle Football rulings
- Play Clock: 25 seconds. A Ready for Play whistle should accompany every play
- Halftime: 10 minutes. (unless mutually shortened)
- Teams will switch ends during quarter breaks
- Mercy Rule: Running Clock continues thru final 2 minutes of 4th quarter if lead is 19 points at any time in the 2nd Half
- Overtime: Each team will go for an extra point, with their choice whether to go for 1 or 2

- Timeouts: 3 per half (use it or lose it) – 1 minute in length
 - No Timeouts in Overtime
- 2 minute TO: There will be a brief stoppage of play to announce the final 2 minutes of the 4th quarter. This is not an official timeout, but the clock will stop and will not start again till the next snap.

3. Starting Play

- Coin toss: Winner chooses offense, defense, or direction.
- Starting positions (always in the middle of the field):
 - 1st half, 2nd half, following scores, and a touchback: Place ball on their own 14 yard line in the middle of the field.
 - Following a safety the starting position will be the 20 yard line and a complete Scrimmage Kick, which will take place by the team who gave up the Safety
- Teams will now give the ball to an official between plays and an official will spot the ball

4. Offense

- Downs/Lines to gain: 4 downs to cross each of the following: their own 20 yard line, 40 yard line (midfield), opponents 20 yard line, and opponents goal line.
- Center snap: QB must be a minimum of 2 yards behind the snapper.
 - Ball must start on the ground, but does not have to go between the snapper's legs
- Blocking: Minimize contact — only screen blocking is allowed
 - Extended hands can result in a foul if contact is made
 - Officials' judgment is dictated by who is deemed to have initiated contact and how the contact impacts the play
 - Screen Blocking permitted anywhere on the field
- Passes: Forward passes allowed from behind the line of scrimmage only.
- Backward Passes: Unlimited behind or beyond the line.
- Motion: Permitted, but only 1 player in motion at the snap (after everyone is set). Cannot be towards the Line of Scrimmage

5. Defense

- No tackling: Play ends when flag is pulled or ball carrier steps out of bounds/knee down.
- Rushing the passer: Defender(s) may rush from a position at or behind the Defensive LOS.
- Minimize contact: Tackling or pushing the ball carrier is a foul.
 - Defenders should avoid "cutting off" the runner to remove a flag. If they are deemed to have impeded the runner, it may result in a flag
 - Diving to remove a flag is permitted unless the action results in contact with another player, which may result in a foul against the defender
 - Contact to the arm of a passer, intentional or not, is subject to being called Roughing the Passer

6. Scrimmage Kicks

- On 4th Down: Teams must declare if they will punt or go for it. Referee will stand over marker and require an announcement of the decision
 - Only way to change decision is to call Timeout, end of quarter, or penalty
- Teams will be allowed time to substitute.
- If kicking is selected:
 - A snap must take place
 - Kickers should be 2 yards behind the LOS (may not result in a foul at this time)
 - Neither team may cross the Neutral Zone until the ball is kicked
 - The defense is permitted to move within their own side of the field
 - Ball may hit the ground and be picked up BUT it is dead if it hits a player and then it hits the ground

7. Scoring

- Touchdown: 6 points.
- Extra point:
 - 1 point from 3-yard line.
 - 2 points from 10-yard line.
- Safety: 2 points.
- Following a score: A flag pull check shall be performed by a teammate on the scoring player
 - If the flag is deemed to have been tied or otherwise manipulated by the official then it will result in an unsportsmanlike foul against the coach and enforced 10 yards from the previous spot with a loss of down. The Coach is disqualified immediately (9-8-1h)

8. Penalties (Common)

- Flag guarding (swatting defender's hands, stiff arm, covering flag): 10 yards from spot.
 - Jumping, diving and spinning are permitted if it does not initiate contact
- Illegal contact/blocking: 10 yards.
- Offsides/false start: 5 yards.
- Delay of game: 5 yards.
- Defensive Holding: 10 yards
- Pass interference:
 - Offense: 10 yards from previous spot
 - Defense: 10 yards from previous spot.
- Unsportsmanlike Fouls: 10 yard penalty from subsequent spot and an automatic first down (if the team who was offended is still in possession)
- Intentional Grounding: 10 yards from previous spot (exception: legal spiking of the ball)

9. Sportsmanship

- Receipt of 2 Unsportsmanlike fouls equate to a disqualification of the player for the remainder of that contest.
- Ejections will follow NCHSAA guidelines and subject to submission to the conference director. Any subsequent handling will come from that office