

Girls Flag Football

2026–27 NFHS Officials Clinic

COMMON PENALTIES • PHILOSOPHY • GAME MANAGEMENT • COMMUNICATION • FLAG JUDGMENT

Presentation Outlines

In this presentation:

- Mentality and philosophy
- Decision-making
- Player education and communication
- Rule reminders and changes
- Reviews over:
 - Screen blocking
 - Flag guarding
 - Roughing the passer
 - Holding
 - Illegal vs marginal contact

The Basics of Flag Football Officiating

gavel

Predictable

Create a predictable environment where teams know the standard.

Penalize early and consistently to set the tone!

shield

Preventive

Use preventive officiating when appropriate to manage the game flow.

Enforce rules decisively whenever they are violated.

visibility_off

Professional

Be accurate first, decisive second, and maintain complete focus on the game.

Strive to remain invisible on the field whenever possible.

The Flag Test

visibility

1. Visual Contact

Did I actually see a rule violation?

gavel

2. Game Impact

Did it create an advantage, restrict an opponent, or create unsafe contact?

record_voice e_over

3. Explainability

Can I clearly explain what happened and where?

warning

GOLDEN RULE OF THROWING

If you did not see the act, do not guess. Guesses make messes.

Throwing vs. Not Throwing

Don't Throw:

- **Incidental movement** with no rule violation.
- **Legitimate flag-pull attempts** with slight incidental contact.
- Runner "flag guards" but has belt pulled **without advantage. YOU CAN STILL ADDRESS.**
- **A legal screen** where position was established and defender had an avoidance path.
- **Awkward movement** that doesn't meet foul elements.
- **Emotion/coach's reaction** is never the reason for a flag.

Throw:

- **Illegal contact** restricts or displaces an opponent.
- **Flag guarding** denies a legitimate flag-pull opportunity.
- **Illegal screening/blocking**, especially when blocker initiates contact. **Call early & consistently.**
- **Contact to the passer** when rusher is not making a legitimate flag-pull attempt.
- Clearly observed **pre-snap or administrative fouls.**

timer

1. Set the Tone

The first few series tell teams what you will and will not allow.

Address preventable issues before they become repeated fouls.

Don't call something in the fourth you don't call in the first!

fact_check

2. Key Focus Areas

Be consistent with flag guarding, screening guidelines, sideline control, and pre-snap discipline.

shield

3. Safety & Consistency

Do not “let them play” when basic contact and safety-related rules are violated.

Consistency matters more than the number of flags.

Preventive Officiating

forum

1. Neutral Language

Use short, neutral language before the snap or during a dead ball.

"Coach, back up please."

"Keep your arms up."

"Try to avoid contact."

block

2. Do Not Coach

Do not coach strategy or tell players how to execute plays.

Once the ball is live, talk only when necessary for safety or administration.

gavel

3. Enforce the Rule

Prevention is not negotiation: it is setting the boundary early.

If the violation continues after a preventive warning, enforce the rule.

WHEN COMMUNICATING:

LISTEN → ACKNOWLEDGE → ANSWER → MOVE ON

9. Pregame & Sideline Management

forum

1. Communication

Meet coaches and establish clear communication expectations before the game starts.

fact_check

2. Equipment

Verify player flag belts, required equipment, and note any unusual local procedures.

sports_football

3. Sidelines

Establish restricted-area and sideline boundary expectations well before kickoff.

Move yard markers 2-3 yards off sideline and instruct benches to stay behind markers.

assignment_ind

4. Administration

Clearly define who will handle timeouts and penalty decisions.

A good pre-game prevents problems that otherwise become game-management issues.

Flag Guarding

A runner cannot:

- Extend their hands or arms to ward off an opponent (stiff arm)
- Use their hands, arms, or the ball where contact occurs between the runner and an opponent that denies the opportunity for an opponent to pull or remove the flag or flag belt

If no advantage gained, LET IT GO, but address it.



visibility

Defender Intent & Contact

- Watch the defender's **intent and technique**.
- A genuine attempt to pull the flag can include **slight incidental contact**.
- Contact without an attempt to pull the flag may be a **foul**.
- On the passer, was there an attempt to pull the flag belt?
- Do not turn every body-to-body brush into a foul.
- Use frequent communication to avoid conflict!

gavel

Runner Acts

- Did the runner gain an advantage? Did the flag-puller create unnecessary or illegal contact?
- There **MUST** be contact to have a flag guarding penalty.
- Jumping, spinning, and diving are **LEGAL** provided there is no illegal contact.

Holding

Players may not:

- Use hands, arms, or legs to hook, lock, clamp, grasp, encircle, or hold in an effort to restrain an opponent

If cloth is pulled away from a player, throw your flag.

Holding is most common on the defense when defenders attempt to pull the flag belts of runners moving away from them.



Charging

No player shall charge into or throw an opponent to the ground.



Excessive Contact

No player shall make any contact that is deemed unnecessary or excessive and which incites roughness.



Screen Blocking

General Rule

- Either team may obstruct an opponent by getting into their path.
- Players CANNOT initiate illegal contact on an opponent

If Contact Occurs

- **Initiator Foul:** Player who initiates contact initiates the foul (illegal contact).
- **Incidental:** If both move legally, it is incidental (no foul).
- **Offsetting:** If both are illegal, it is offsetting penalties.

cancel

Blockers May NOT:

- Step up closer than a normal step behind a stationary opponent
 - They may move laterally, obliquely, or backwards
- **Initiate contact** when blocking in front of a stationary opponent
- Block in the path of a moving opponent without giving time to avoid (~1-2 steps)
- Move unless maintaining a legal position adhering to the above

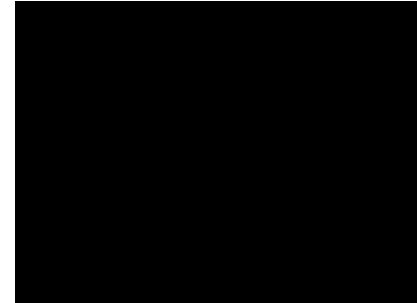
Screen Blocking

warning

Examples of Illegal Actions:

- **Chicken wing**
- **Extending arms or legs to initiate contact**
- **Using legs/knees outside of their frame to initiate contact**
- **Using a shoulder to initiate contact**

We must call these
EVERY TIME!!!



Determining Marginal vs Illegal Contact: Judge the Whole Play

Key Considerations

- Who initiated the contact?
- Was there a **legitimate flag football** action?
- Was there a legitimate attempt to **pull the flag**?
- Did the action **restrict an opponent** or **create an advantage**?

Philosophy

Was the contact marginal or illegal?

- **Do not excuse** illegal contact because it was accidental.
- **Do not penalize** legal flag-pull contact simply because bodies touched.
 - Players will fall after the flag pull, our job is to determine if that contact exceeds the marginal level.



Roughing the Passer

Defensive players:

- Must make a definite effort to avoid charging into a passer or player attempting to pass the ball
- Must make an effort to pull the passer's flag
- May not contact the passing arm or head of the player attempting to throw a pass (our flag should be **AUTOMATIC!**)
- May not bat a ball from the attempted passer's arm
- May not commit any other illegal personal contact foul on a pass



timer

Pre-Snap & Cadence

- **Be boring before the snap:** set the neutral zone, analyze motions/shifts, count players, and check for legal equipment.
- **Referee cadence:** down, LTG, and whistle
EVERY PLAY!
 - “1st to the 20, BEEP”
 - “2nd to the Goal, BEEP”
 - “4th to the 40, offense is playing, BEEP”
 - “4th down, offense is kicking, BEEP”

notifications_active

Dead-Ball Management

- **Whistle discipline:** Blow the whistle promptly when the ball becomes dead.
- **Preventive officiating:** Use your voice and presence when prevention is needed.
- **Post-whistle focus:** Watch players, communicate with your crew, and reset.
- **Maintain control:** Do not let a dead-ball moment become a player/coach conference.

Inside Conversion Attempts Review

event_available

When Allowed

- Anytime (during regulation)
- Team must be losing in score
- Attempted following the Try after a touchdown

touch_app

Team's Choice

- **Declaration:** Following Try and if above is met, coach must ask officials to "keep the ball"
- **Possession:** Once declared, the team must play with possession of the ball

play_circle_outline

The Attempt

Setup: The scoring team would take possession of the ball with a 4th down play on their own 20-yard line.

Rules: All rules, including timing, for a scrimmage down shall apply.

Scoring and Safety Reminders

FOLLOWING A SCORE:

- Offensive turnovers during any try immediately result in a **DEAD BALL**.
- **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: unsportsmanlike foul against the coach (with DQ) and enforced 10 yards from the previous spot with a loss of down

SAFETY

A safety occurs when:

- A team is responsible for the ball being in their own end zone and it becomes dead there.
- An offensive penalty is accepted and the enforcement spot is from their own end zone.

Following a Safety:

The team whose goal line was involved shall put the ball in play by a scrimmage kick (punt) from its own **20-yard line**.

What Would You Call?

shield

SCREEN

Blocker steps into defender just before pursuit.

- Was position established?
- Who initiated contact?
- Was the blocker in their frame?

front_hand

FLAG PULL

Defender reaches for flag and bodies brush.

- Was there a genuine flag-pull attempt?
- Did the puller initiate marginal or illegal contact?

do_not_disturb

NO CALL

Incidental contact during legal pursuit.

- Did any rule element actually occur?
- Was a player's safety at risk?

forum

COACH DISCIPLINE

"Why didn't you call that?" **Can you answer in one sentence and move on?**

gavel

GOLDEN RULE

Require officials to identify the rule element, not just the result.

Flag is a different game!

On close plays at a line to gain, the person getting the spot should yell “SHORT” or “FIRST.”

Flag is an audible game. Use your voices.

A close game does not change your foul standard.

If a team elect to kick (punt), clearly announce the decision, provide time for the defense to sub, and get into your referee cadence.

A ball in player possession cannot be batted, stripped, or attempted to be stripped by punching, striking or grabbing.

Call illegal screen blocking acts EARLY!

There is no “quarterback,” only passers. Protect them.

Everyone is an eligible receiver.

In Review

- 01** Protect the players.
- 02** Know the rules. Don't make "ish" up.
- 03** See the whole play. Start, develop, finish.
- 04** Don't guess. Guesses make messes.
- 05** Prevent what can be prevented.
- 06** Throw when a rule is violated. Get the easy ones.
- 07** Communicate briefly and professionally.
- 08** Have an open mind!