

Flag vs. High School

Where youth flag parts company with Friday night: the flag rule first, then the high school one. 5/6 and 7/8 are the grade levels; HS is NFHS.

CLOCK

- **Quarters run.** 10 min at 5/6, 12 at 7/8; halftime 5, no break between. HS: four 12s, stopped clock, 15 at half.
- **Stop-time** is the last minute of each half only, and none at all while a team leads by 18.
- **Play clock** 45 at 5/6, 30 at 7/8; first offence a warning. HS: 40/25, always 5.
- **Timeouts** two a half, one minute; a coach may call one. HS: three. An injury sits the player a play.
- **Kneel-down** is announced; the defense is told not to rush. No HS equivalent.

FIELD, TEAMS AND WHO MAY RUN

- **Field** 40 × 80 yards, 7 to 11 a side, both teams equal. HS: 160ft × 100 yards, and 11.
- **Coaches on the field** all season at 5/6, first two games at 7/8. HS: never.
- **Weight rule:** over 120lbs (5/6) or 150 (7/8) may not run as a back or returner. They may play QB in a helmet cover — hand off or pass, never run.

SCORING

- **A touchdown needs the ball *and* the flags** across the plane. HS: the ball alone. Same for a

safety.

- **Try** 1 from the 2½, 2 from the 5, run or pass; nobody kicks a field goal. HS: one snap from the 3, kick for 1.
- **After a safety** the ball goes to the 40. HS: the scored-on team free-kicks from its 20.

LEADING BY 18 — THE MERCY RULE

- **Mandatory, in this order**, one more each time the leader scores again: rushers wait 3 seconds; the trailing team gets 5 downs; the leader gets 3, and punts or surrenders on third.
- The clock then stops only for injuries and officials' timeouts. HS: a running clock is a state adoption and never touches the downs.

LIVE BALL, DEAD BALL

- **The spot is where the flag came off**, not where the runner ended up.
- **Down** on a knee, on a fall with the flags on, when progress stops, or whenever the official judges the runner unsafe — wider than any HS rule, deliberately.
- **Leaving the feet to advance** is illegal; spot it where they left the ground. HS: legal unless he hurdles an opponent (15).

- **Stiff arms are legal.** A push out is legal only within 3 feet of the sideline; beyond that, a tackle.
- **Fumbles at 5/6 are dead** where they hit the ground, dropped snaps included. Live for either team at 7/8, as at HS.
- **A muffed kickoff at 7/8** is R's alone, and R may advance it. HS: K may recover after 10 yards.

KICKS, AND THE PUNT THAT ISN'T

- **Nobody punts.** The ball is moved 25 yards (5/6) or 30 (7/8), and never past the opponent's 20.
- **No kickoff at 5/6** — the game, the half and every score restart at the 20.
- **At 7/8 kick from the 30.** R's front line holds between its 40 and 35 until the kick: five minimum, four on a 7-man team, none over 150lbs behind.

ALIGNMENT — COUNT BEFORE EVERY SNAP

- **Offense:** at most three off the line, the QB among them. Guard-centre-guard, splits of 1 to 3 feet, helmets inside the centre's waist.
- **Linemen downfield:** 2 yards in flag, 2 at HS. 5 yards either way.
- **Defense:** 3 on the line of 7, 4 of 8 or 9, 5 of 10. Linebackers 2 yards off. No nose tackle head-up on the centre. HS dictates none of it.
- **Only defensive linemen may rush,** never more than the line requires. HS: anyone, any number.

- **The 3-yard box:** the QB is a passer until they break it on a roll-out; contact before that is roughing.

PENALTIES THAT READ DIFFERENTLY

- **Tackling is a foul, and graded:** incidental 5, intentional 10, flagrant 10 plus 10, repeated flagrant 20 and out four quarters.
- **Legal though the runner goes down:** a push out inside 3 feet, a blocker driven into the runner, impeding the runner to reach the flag.
- **Face mask 10** — from the spot on offense, from the line on defense. HS: 5 incidental, 15 twist or pull.
- **Pass interference 10** from the line; inside the 10 or in the end zone, ball on the 1 and first down. HS: 15 either way, no automatic first down.
- **The breakaway rule:** a runner held after obviously breaking loose gets the 1 and a first down. No HS equivalent.
- **Guarding the flag** costs the spot, no yardage. **Unsportsmanlike** is 10 from the line; two in a game sits the player four quarters.
- **Unchanged from HS:** open-hand blocking (HS allows more in the free-blocking zone), unlimited substitution, the coin toss and deferral, half the distance to the goal — and preventive officiating, which this rule set asks for by name. Warn first.

Built from this site's flag football rules page and its NFHS rules summary. Last checked September 19, 2026. Confirm with the association before relying on this.