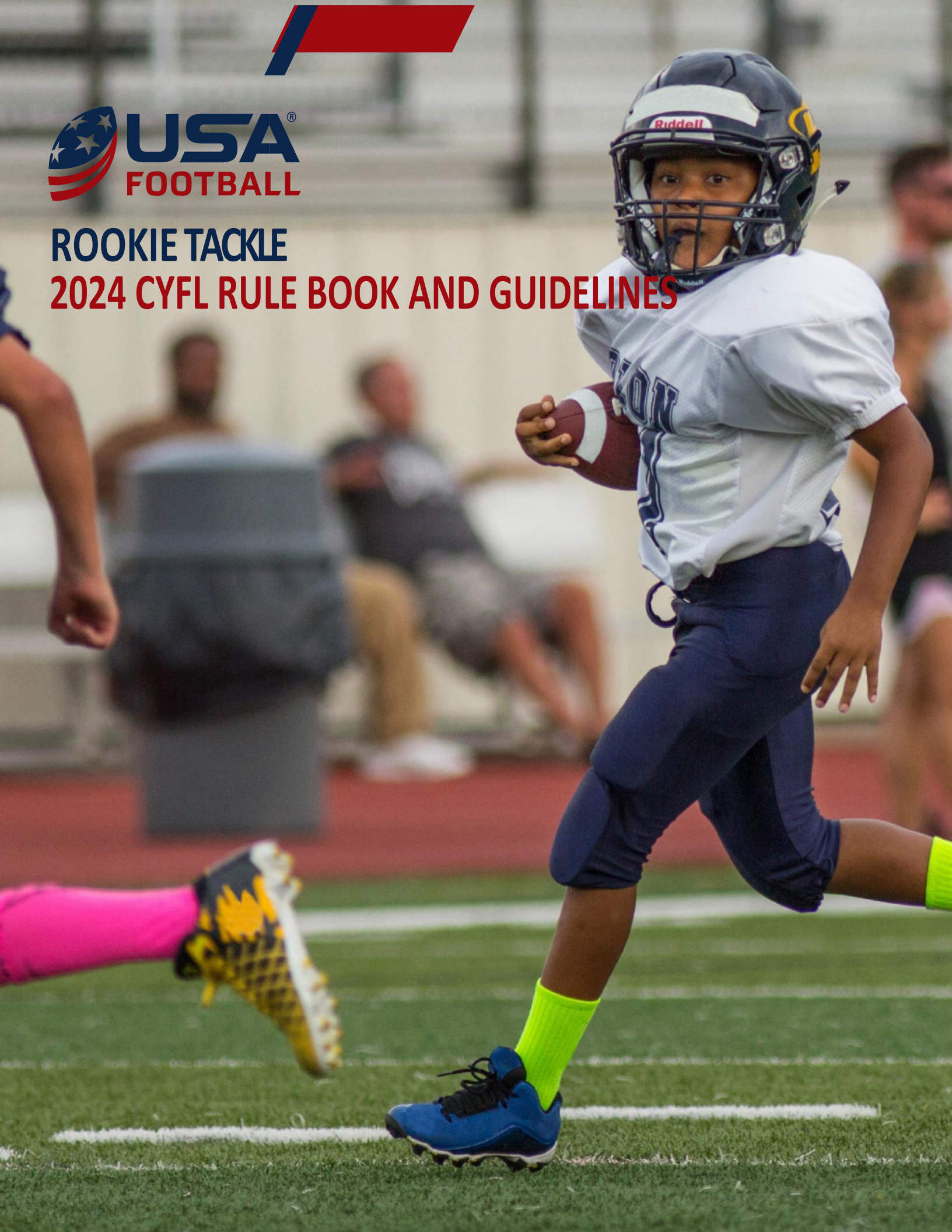




**ROOKIE TACKLE**

**2024 CYFL RULE BOOK AND GUIDELINES**



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHY ROOKIE TACKLE	3
CYFL IMPLEMENTATION & GAME PHILOSOPHY	4
FIELD OF PLAY	5
8 PLAYER RULES	6
CONTRACTS FOR REFEREES	7
LICENCED TRAINED MEDICAL PERSONNEL	7
COACHING	8
OFFENSIVE ADJUSTMENTS	8
DEFENSIVE ADJUSTMENTS	11
SPECIAL TEAMS ADJUSTMENTS	14
TIMING	14
SCORING	14
TEAM ROSTERS – LINEUPS	15
PARTICIPATION BEST PRACTICES	16
WEEKLY PRACTICE AND CONTACT LIMITS	17
APPENDIX	18, 19

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# WHY ROOKIE TACKLE

Rookie Tackle, a small-sided version of the sport, serves as a bridge game between flag football and traditional 11-player tackle. USA Football, a member of the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC), recommends Rookie Tackle as an introduction to tackle football. Rookie Tackle builds upon the skills gained in flag as part of a player pathway in alignment with the USOC's Development Model.

By playing Rookie Tackle in the year(s) between flag and 11-player football, coaches and FDM Administrators can:

- Increase teams' coach-to-player ratio.
- Play in an age-appropriate space.
- Decrease the cognitive load on individual players.
- Lessen the number of players on the field.
- Focus on skill development.
- Foster a fun, positive experience for young players.

These are just some of the factors that allow coaches to dedicate greater attention to skill development, especially newly introduced skills of blocking, defeating blocks and tackling. A greater focus on teaching these aspects of the sport advances young players' understanding and learning of foundational skills, helping them transition to 11-player tackle and regulation sized fields.

USA Football's Rookie Tackle pilot season in 2017 encompassed 10 youth leagues that changed the game type in their youngest contact age division from 11-player to Rookie Tackle.

By simply swapping out the youngest tackle group with Rookie Tackle, you invite athletes with a game type that best fits their physical abilities and aptitude. The steps toward proficiency are not increased by earlier introduction, but by introducing young athletes to the best version of the sport for them based on their physical and cognitive abilities to learn fundamental movement and football skills.

For single age/grade groupings, this has shown to be an easier process as the players moving up from flag football to contact brought little-to-no experience in the 11-player game type. Through this process, players and parents were able to learn Rookie Tackle rules and gain the positive benefits of the FDM.

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# CYFL IMPLEMENTATION AND GAME PHILOSOPHY

Like all other forms of youth football, USA Football envisions leagues and clubs adopting the Rookie Tackle game structure and adding this offering to their league pathway. While USA Football will provide the initial game structure and rule book, we are aware it will be governed and implemented at local levels.

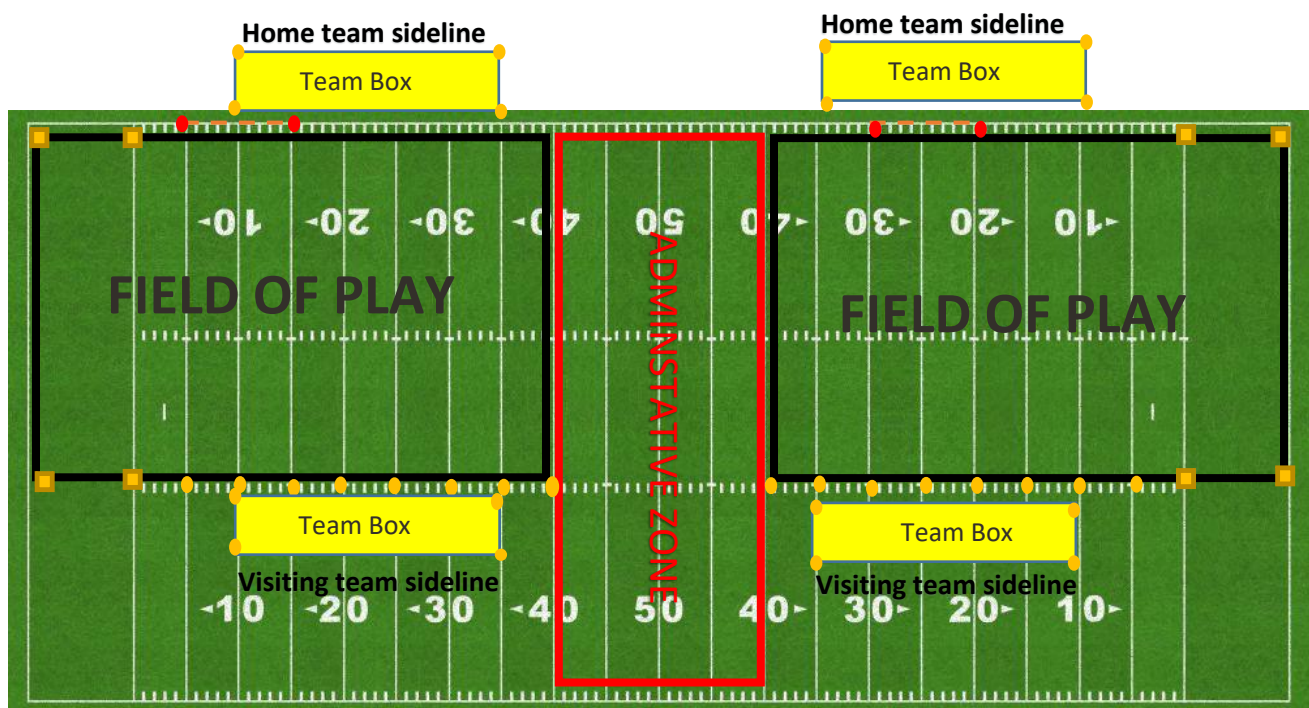
## The goals of Rookie Tackle are:

1. Participants learning the “all positions, all football skills” model.
  - a. Not all players may play every position, every game or even through the course of the entire season. All players should have at least one offensive and defensive line position as well as one offensive and defensive skill position to play each game.
  - b. In practice, players should learn all skills of all positions for development purposes in accordance with the Football Development Model (FDM) guidelines.
2. Maximizing player enjoyment and skill development.
3. Ensuring all players have meaningful playing time and the opportunity for improvement and success during game action.
4. Providing a bridge between flag football and the 11-player, full-field tackle version or as an introduction prior to 11-player tackle.
5. Encouraging leagues to play on a smaller field size that is appropriately scaled to the age and skill level of the youth football player.
6. Encouraging a fast-paced game with more plays, greater activity, and the promotion of fun.
7. Emphasizing fundamental skill development by isolating situations for players to showcase their abilities via formation regulations and limited field size.
8. Allowing leagues and clubs to maximize field space by playing two games at a time on one regulation-sized football field.
9. Limiting roster sizes to foster participation and provide more focused, individualized coaching attention during practice and on game day.
  - a. Roster caps are recommended at two times the number of players on the field, (meaning a league/club playing 8-on-8 should cap rosters at 16). Smaller rosters are preferred.
  - b. Fewer players on the sideline means fewer substitutions and more playing time for each athlete.

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# FIELD OF PLAY

1. The playing field is 40 x 35.5 yards (sideline to far side hash), allowing for two fields to be created on a traditional 100-yard field at the same time.
2. One sideline is a traditional sideline, and the other side extends along the inside of the far side hash on a traditional football field and **must** be marked with cones every five yards. Use traditional pylons, if available, to mark the goal line and the back line of the end zone.
3. Additional cones can be placed between the five-yard cones and in line with the far side hash to further outline the playing surface if desired.
4. All possessions start at the 40-yard line going toward the end zone.
  - a. This leaves a 20-yard buffer zone between the two game fields for game administration and safety purposes. Game officials, league personnel, athletic trainers and designated coaches are allowed in this space.
  - b. The offensive huddle may take place in the administrative Zone.
  - c. Players not in the game stand on the sidelines with one or more coach (es) to supervise.
  - d. The standard players' box should be used for sideline players. With the field split in two, this keeps players between the 10- and 35-yard line (with cones) on each respective field and side.
5. First downs, down markers and the chain gang are administered in accordance with National Federation (NFHS) starting from the 40-yard line.



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# 8 PLAYER RULES

Rookie Tackle uses the NFHS rule book as a base and employs the following adjustments for 8-player football.

1. All home teams must have a Field Manager/Marshal present during all home games. Responsibilities should include facility, game, and crowd management. Welcoming visiting teams, showing pre-game warm-up space, and coaches meeting. Field Manager/Marshal should always have a copy of the Rookie Rules.
2. Because of the “all players, all positions, all skills philosophy,” there are no restrictions on jersey numbers or player positions.
  - a. All players should have at least one offensive and defensive line position as well as one offensive and one defensive backfield position to play each game. Not all players may play every position every game or even through the course of the entire season.
  - b. In practice, players should learn all skills of all positions for developmental purposes.
3. All game action takes place on one half of the field with all possessions starting on the 40-yard line going toward the end zone.
4. A turnover on downs brings the ball back to the 40-yard line, and the teams switch sides from offense to defense, defense to offense.
5. Turnovers are blown dead immediately. No returns are allowed to protect players. Play restarts on the 40-yard line with the recovering/intercepting team now on offense. There are no defensive touchdowns.
  - a. Rule application: A fumble is a live ball until a player recovers it, lands out of bounds, or approaches the administrative zone and officials determine the play should be blown dead.
    - i. Defensive recoveries, as turnovers, are blown dead.
    - ii. An offensive player may recover and advance a fumble.
6. After each play, the ball is spotted in the middle of the field.
7. Because of the limited field size, all 15-yard penalties are enforced as 10-yard penalties.
8. No offensive penalty can take the ball beyond the 40-yard line.
  - a. Rule application (past the 40-yard line): A five-yard penalty called and accepted on the 38-yard line would result in a loss of two yards and the ball spotted on the 40-yard line.
  - b. Rule application (past the 40-yard line): Penalties on the offense in which yardage is lost, even if limited in enforcement by the 40-yard line, are enforced as written in terms of down lost or replayed.
  - c. Rule application (on the 40-yard line or in administrative zone): Penalties on the offense that are called and accepted on or behind the 40-yard line result in a loss of down. A penalty that would normally include a loss of down would not result in a second loss of down on the same play.

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9. There are no defensive safeties. Tackles behind the 40-yard line are re-spotted at the 40-yard line with the offense still retaining the ball as long as a down remains.
  10. All unsportsmanlike conduct penalties include an immediate required substitution from the field for a minimum of one play to allow coaches to address misconduct and promote good sportsmanship. We call this a “cooling off period.”
    - a. If a team does not have any substitutes for the game, coaches and officials should discuss during the pregame meeting how to apply league standards for this situation.
  11. All plays are blown dead, and the ball is returned to the 40-yard line if an offensive ball-carrier or a fumbled ball crosses over midfield (50-yard line) or, at the official’s discretion, if the action of the play penetrates too deeply into the administrative Zone.
  12. Footballs for all Rookie Tackle games can be Youth (size 8) or Junior (size 7) sized Leather or composite Leather footballs. No Rubber footballs will be allowed.

## CONTRACTS FOR REFEREES

1. Booking of all game officials are responsibility of the home team.
2. A minimum of one (1) registered WIAA officials need to be present for a game to start. If a minimum of one (1) are not present, the scheduled game may be conducted as a scrimmage. No score will be kept. Present referees must be paid the league standard stipend even if a scrimmage does not take place. A CYFL Sanction will be issued, to be reviewed by league membership.
3. Whether apprentice officials will be used is to be determined by each organization for their home contests. Organizations are not required to utilize this program.  
*\*\*\*\* Apprentice is defined as an official with less than one full year of officiating experience \*\*\*\**
4. Home teams will be responsible to schedule minimum two (2) officials for each game. Game fees for officials shall be as follows:
  - a) The league recommends a minimum stipend of \$55 per official per game. If one is an apprentice, they can be paid at a reduced rate of \$45 per game.

## LICENCED TRAINED MEDICAL PERSONNEL

Follow CYFL league rules.

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# COACHING

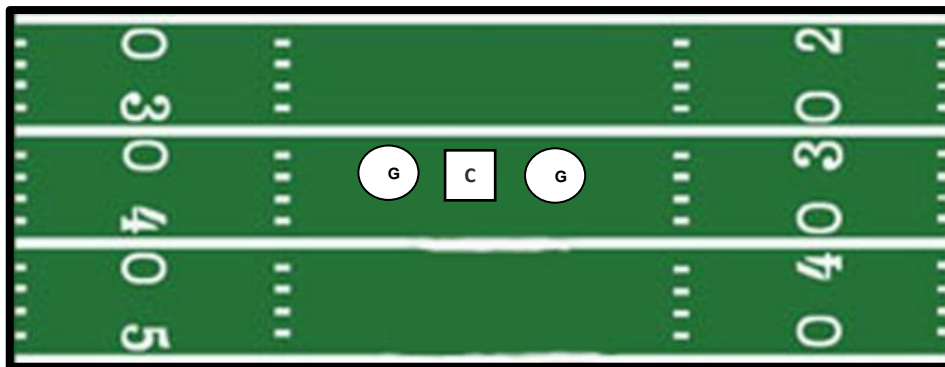
Each team is allowed two offensive coaches in the huddle that must move back 10 yards from the line of scrimmage, and one defensive coach that must move back 20 yards from the line of scrimmage. This is intended to facilitate instruction, faster play calling, to keep the speed of the game and activity levels high. Once the huddle is broken, the on-field coaches may (and should) assist the officials in alignment issues as the goal of the game is development, not persistent penalties. Offensive coaches have the option of having up to 4 reserve players on the field behind them, to speed up substitutions.

After the huddle is broken, though, there is to be no extra instruction, audibles or changing of plays allowed. Extra instruction after the huddle break will result in one warning, and any continued infractions will result in a five-yard penalty. This rule is enforced per team, not per individual coach.

Teams have the option to rotate which coaches are on the field at any time.

# OFFENSIVE ADJUSTMENTS

1. Each play must include three offensive linemen – a center and two guards, one on either side of the center. These players are ineligible for first touch as the receiver of a pass.
  - a. Player rotations may result with traditional non-lineman numbers at these positions for the purpose of fundamental skill development.

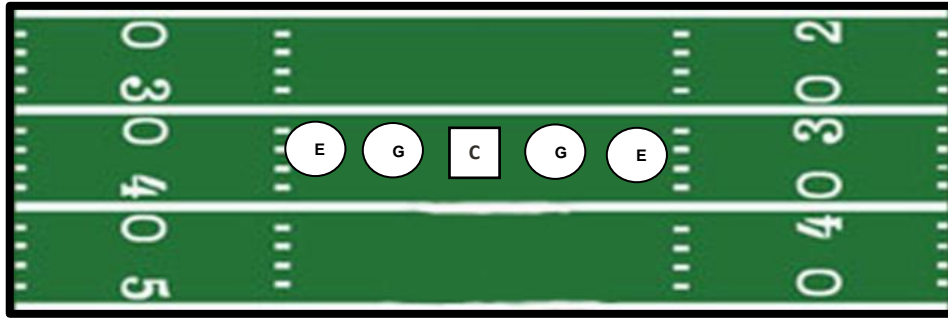


2. Guards may play in either two-point or three-point stances.
3. The distance between a guard and center may not exceed three feet (one yard) but may be closer.
4. Because of all players, all positions, all skills philosophy, players should change positions during the game. Therefore:
  - a. Once in position as an offensive lineman, players may not shift to another position.
  - b. All three offensive linemen are ineligible for first touch on a pass.
5. The quarterback-center exchange may be direct, pistol or shotgun.
6. Quarterback sneaks are prohibited in ALL situations because the defense is not allowed to have players aligned over the center or in the center-guard A-gap. **Quarterback must run outside the Tackles.**

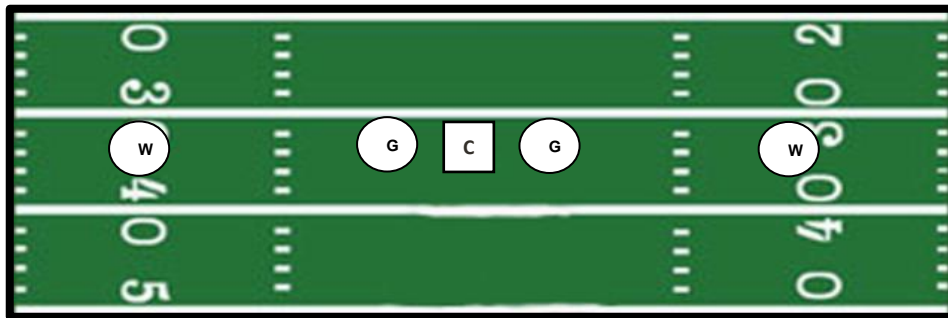


7. The offense must have five players on the line of scrimmage. No more, no less. The fourth and fifth players can be tight ends, split ends, or a combination of the two. Only the Center and two (2) guards are not eligible to catch a pass. (See 4b)

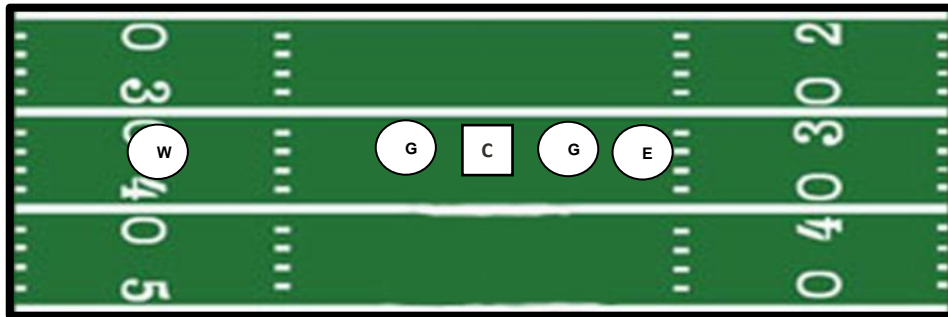
There are **NO** unbalanced lines. The split ends/tight ends must be on opposite sides of the center.



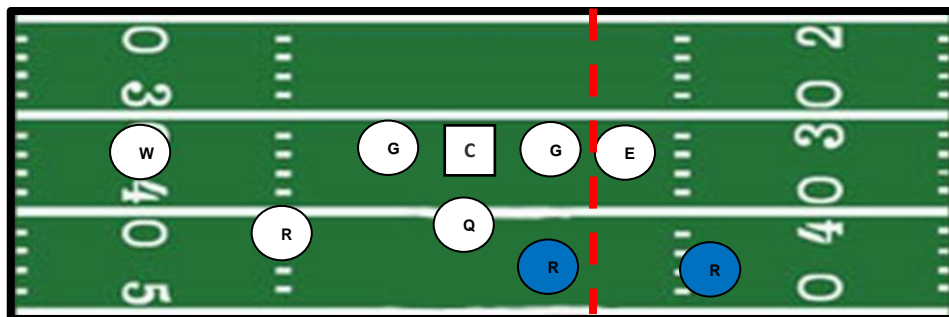
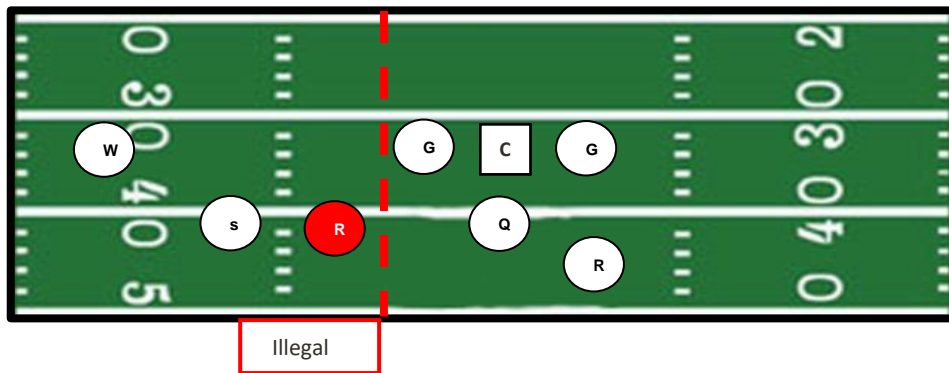
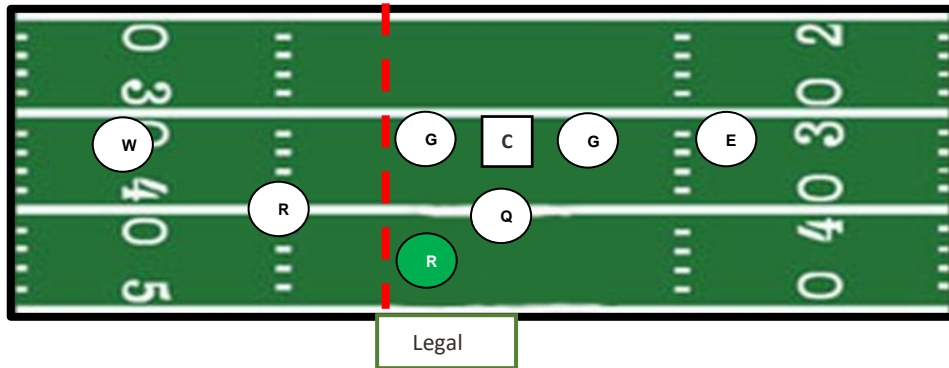
or



or



8. The five offensive players who are not playing guard or center may be deployed in positions at the coach's discretion as long as two are on the line of scrimmage.
- No more than Two (2) players are allowed outside the Guard on one side (no trips are allowed).
9. No trips formations are allowed.
- For purpose of Rookie Tackle, trips are defined as any three players outside the guard-to-guard box on the same side of the ball.

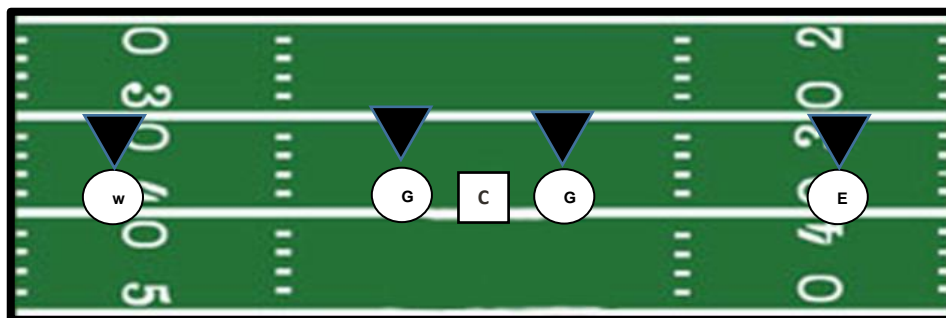


**Both legal:** Even if outside the G-G box there are only two (2) players on the side of the field, NOT Trips

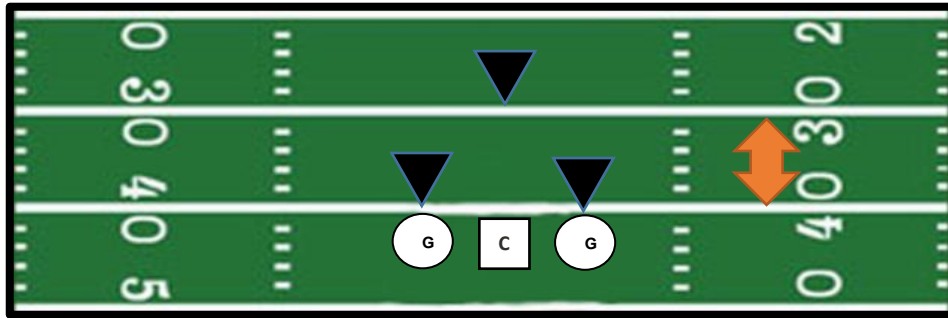
- 10. Motion is allowed if it does not form a trips formation.
- 11. All blocks below the waist by any player anywhere on the field are illegal.



2. No blitzes are allowed. Players within the box at the snap can penetrate upon the snap. Linebackers, safeties, and cornerbacks (both on the line and at depth) can flow to the ball naturally after a handoff is made or if quarter back leaves the box (rollout), but predetermining penetration to a specific gap is illegal.
  - a. The box includes offensive players who line up within two yards of the ball and on the line of scrimmage along with the defensive players lined up directly over them.
    - i. Rule application: The restriction on blitzing is intended to encourage skill development within the passing game and allow young players to execute a successful handoff with limited penetration.
    - ii. **MLB on the defense needs to be same size as the offensive backfield. If the defense line is Big the MLB needs to be Little. 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter MLB is a Little and 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> the MLB is Big.**
    - iii. Rule enforcement: Illegal blitzes by a linebacker or defensive back shall be enforced as an illegal procedure foul and a five-yard live ball penalty. If continued blitzing is determined to be a product of coach encouragement, a 10-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty can occur.
  - b. On pass plays, anyone outside the box on the snap cannot rush the quarterback and must remain behind the line of scrimmage in pass coverage.
3. Defensive linemen must be aligned on the guards and/or tight ends in a head up or outside shade position.
4. Players in an outside shade must always have one foot aligned inside the stance of the opposing player.
5. **Defensive line of scrimmage players may not penetrate the A-gap on the snap of the ball. Defensive line player must fully engage contact, with the both hands to the shoulder pads of the offensive line player before defeating the block into the A-gap.**
  - a. Rule enforcement: Deliberate stunting into the A-gap is to be treated as an illegal procedure foul and enforced as a five-yard live ball penalty.
6. If the offense aligns with no tight ends, the defense may still align with four players on the line of scrimmage, but they must be positioned over the receivers they are covering.
  - a. Except for the players covering the guards, the defense is not required to have additional players on the line of scrimmage but has the option to do so.

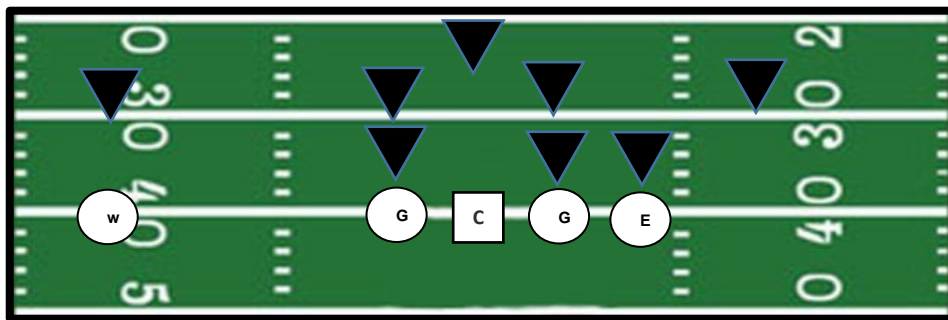


7. The defense must have one player at least 10 yards from the ball.



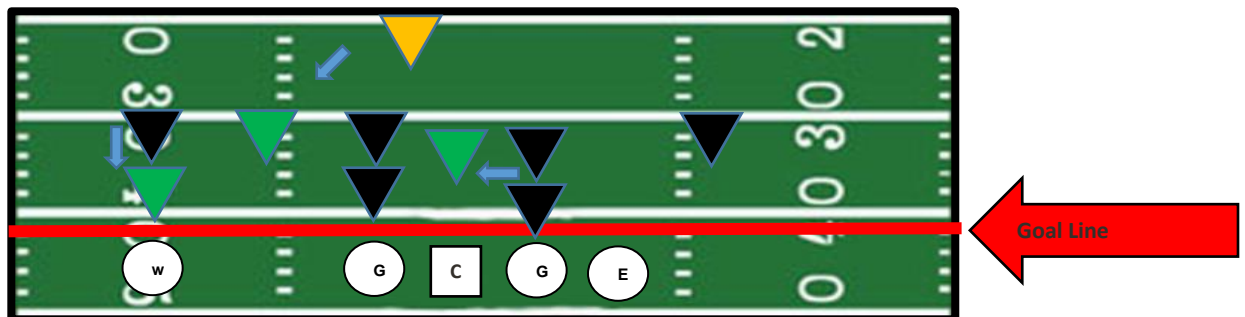
8. All remaining players not on the line of scrimmage or at ten-yard-deep safety must be a minimum of five yards off the line of scrimmage.

a. Defenses that choose to not match the eligible receivers on the line of scrimmage may position those players on the second level if they are at least five yards from the line of scrimmage.



9. If the ball is inside the five-yard line, any non-lineman may align anywhere on goal line. Players weights should match that of the slot receivers.

Options



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## SPECIAL TEAMS ADJUSTMENTS

1. There are no special teams.
  - a. There are no kickoffs or punts. Each possession starts with the ball on the 40-yard line, regardless of whether there is a score, turnover, or turnover on downs.
  - b. There are no extra points by a kick.
    - i. All PATs are attempted through a run or pass try.
    - ii. Coaches can choose to go for one point from the three-yard line or two points from the five-yard line.

## TIMING

1. Each game is made up of four **(10)** - minute quarters with a running clock.
  - a. The clock should be stopped after a score (the PAT is an untimed down) and to allow players to switch sides of the field and offense to defense.
  - b. Clock will stop on all turnovers.
  - c. Once the ball is placed at the 40-yard line the starting of the clock will be at the snap.
2. Each team is allowed three (3) timeouts per half.
3. The first and third quarter breaks are two minutes. This allows enough time for water, rest, and new position assignments that will ensure rotations occur and players learn multiple skills.
4. Halftime is five minutes.
5. Soft 30 second play clock.

## SCORING

1. Offensive touchdowns are worth six points.
2. PATs are the coach's choice to attempt a one-point try from the three-yard line or a two-point try from the five-yard line.
3. With no special teams, there are no field goal attempts.
4. There are no defensive touchdowns as all turnovers are blown dead immediately. No returns are allowed.
5. There are no two-point defensive safeties. All tackles behind the 40-yard line result in a loss of down, but the offense retains the ball, and the ball is re-spotted at the 40-yard line to preserve the administrative zone.

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# TEAM ROSTERS – LINEUPS

1. Rosters limits should therefore be set to 12 – 16 players in accordance with league adoption. This roster size ensures all players achieve meaningful playing time and is more manageable for the coach. Players should be rotated not only between offense and defense but among both line and backfield positions during the course of a game.
2. USA Football recognizes that body size alone is not the determining factor of on-field success and therefore coaches should look to ensure competitive matchups by a blend of body size, speed, temperament, skills, and ability.
3. These rules are to guide opposing teams' coaches in a partnership of providing the best developmental experience for players, not to be exploited for coaches to scheme favorable matchups in search of victory.
4. Prior to the start of each game, coaches are **required to exchange** two (2) "lineup" cards, one for offense and one for defense. (See Appendix Sheet on back page)
  - a) Each card should display their players rotation, (**by player number and weight**) for each position and for all four quarters.
  - b) The intent of ROOKIE Tackle is to ensure that Each player has an opportunity to play backfield/receiver and line positions. Quarterbacks & running backs (backfield players) must not play two consecutive quarters in the same position. Must not play in more than two quarters total at a skilled position in any game. (One play constitutes a quarter)
  - c) Backfield players (quarterbacks & Running backs) needs to rotate into a line positions every other quarter.
  - d) Team rosters are finalized and weighed in by the league, divide your team into **two** groups according to their weight.
    - a. The heaviest half of your roster will be your "Bigs."
    - b. The lightest half of your roster will be your "Littles."
  - e) Identify these players on your league summited rosters sheets with a Bigs "B" or Littles" L" in the column provided.
  - f) On offense, the "Bigs" are on the line of scrimmage positions (center & both guards) during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> quarters and the "Littles" are in the backfield positions. (quarterback & both running backs)
  - g) During the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quarters things are reversed. ("Bigs" are in the backfield & "Littles" are on the line)
  - h) MLB on the defense needs to be same size as the offensive backfield. If the defense line is Big the MLB needs to be Little. 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter MLB is a Little and 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> the MLB is Big.**
  - i) Lineup card must have lineup card prior to game and have prior to pre-game line up cards.: google doc to access the information, must be official league lineup card.
  - j) Penalty for not providing a Position Card before the game is loss of possession for either half. Even if you win the coin toss.**
5. All Rookie players will weigh in at the league scrimmage.

Quarters	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>
QB	#7/78lbs	#14/55lbs	12	10
RB	#30/89lbs	32	42	66
RB	45	37	88	99
RECEIVER	12	99	32	45
LINE	14	42	99	88
LINE	32	30	7	14
CENTER	37	45	10	12
TE	66/85#	10	45	30
OFFENSE				

Quarters	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>
RIGHT TACKLE	#22/82lbs	12	66	99
LEFT TACKLE	#30/105lbs	88	30	37
MLB	99	7	88	88
LB	12	14	32	7
R-CORNER	88	32	45	10
LEFT CORNER	7	99	14	14
SAFETY	10	37	37	32
SAFETY	14	66	12	42
DEFENSE				

## PARTICIPATION BEST PRACTICES

Rookie Tackle coaches will be trained to teach the fundamentals of every position in USA Football’s online and in-person education programs with the aim of rotating players to sample a variety of positions throughout the course of the season. The goal of the 8-player game is to introduce players to the contact skills of blocking and tackling while building off the flag football model of multi-position skill development.

To accomplish this, the “all player, all positions, all skills” motto remains the focus for coaches in this introduction to tackle football. It is acknowledged that not all players will play every position every game. Some may not get to play every position throughout the season, but development in practice is still vitally important. It is best to allow players to learn all skills in practice to best develop their full athletic potential in line with the principles of the American Development Model.

USA Football strongly recommends that team rosters be set at no more than two times the 8-player game format being played. The league recommendation is a roster of 12 to 16 players. This roster size ensures all players achieve meaningful playing time and is more manageable for the coach. It is further recommended to, if possible, keep the number below the cap to allow for a smaller team with less players on the sideline during a game. This results in less substitutions and more playing time for each athlete. Upon a change of possession, all players on the bench should rotate onto the field. Players should be rotated not only between offense and defense, but also among line and backfield positions during a game. Going into each game, each athlete should have at least one offensive and defensive line position and one offensive and defensive backfield position.

The practices of changing positions by quarter have proven to be very successful. One of the ways this has been accomplished is by matching the “big vs. big and “littles vs. littles” on the line and covering each other at skill positions.



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It is recognized that body size alone is not the determining factor of on-field success and therefore coaches should look to ensure competitive matchups by a blend of body size, speed, temperament, skills, and ability. Pregame communication of gifted or aggressive players that maybe very useful in letting opposing coaches know what quarters certain players should be matched up against each other regardless of “big/littles” standards.

**These rules should act to guide opposing teams’ coaches in a partnership of providing the best developmental experience for players, not to be exploited for coaches to scheme favorable matchups in search of victory.**

Mismatches in ability levels should be identified early in the game with changes made as soon as possible to ensure a competitive balance. Coaches are encouraged to keep players at an assigned position for the duration of the quarter and rotate on the quarter break unless the competitive balance of the matchups are deteriorating the game. For all athletes to develop, we want each player to be challenged appropriately. Better players only get better by competing against other quality players and newer, or less skilled players fair better against equally skilled opponents. Coaches should work together to find the best matchups for each player during the game.

Athletes are not to be situationally shifted from line to skill positions during the quarter when a key moment occurs. We want to avoid situations in which an athlete plays on the offensive line for first and second down and move to quarterback or running back on key third and fourth down. This allows players to get repetitions in all positions and all situations to assist in their development.

One of the most common questions around position sampling is the bigger, stronger, faster athlete who is now allowed to rotate into a ball carrying position. With the quarter rotation, one of the benefits is this athlete would not be able to play running back (as an example) for the entire game. They are forced to rotate to the line. If the athlete is truly talented, they should have the ability to learn multiple positions and may only play running back for one quarter. This limits the competitive imbalance of the game naturally through the rotation system.

## **WEEKLY PRACTICE AND CONTACT LIMITS**

Rookie Tackle should limit preseason practices to 10 hours per week until school starts, then 6 hours thereafter.

After the 10-hour conditioning period per player is completed, full-contact drills should be limited to 30 minutes per practice for no more than 90 minutes total per week.

Updated (04/4/2023)

# APPENDIX

These rules at top should act to guide opposing teams' coaches in a partnership of providing the best developmental experience for players, not to be exploited for coaches to scheme favorable matchups in search of victory. Position Card must be available prior to start of the game. Penalty for not providing a Position Card before the game is loss of possession for either half. Even if you win the coin toss.

Position Card (include Jersey # and Weigh lbs.) (Example #27/89lbs)

Quarters	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4th
QB				
RB				
RB				
RECEIVER				
LINE				
LINE				
CENTER				
TE				
OFFENSE				

Quarters	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4th
RIGHT TACKLE				
LEFT TACKLE				
MLB				
LB				
R-CORNER				
LEFT CORNER				
SAFETY				
SAFETY				
DEFENSE				

Team Roster (spilt with half – Heavier half Bigs, Lighter half Littles)

Player (Number)	Bigs (weight)	Player (Number)	Littles (weigh)

These rules at top should act to guide opposing teams' coaches in a partnership of providing the best developmental experience for players, not to be exploited for coaches to scheme favorable matchups in search of victory. Position Card must be available prior to start of the game. Penalty for not providing a Position Card before the game is loss of possession for either half. Even if you win the coin toss.

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Quarters	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4th		Quarters	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4th
QB						RIGHT TACKLE				
RB						LEFT TACKLE				
RB						MLB				
RECEIVER						LB				
LINE						R-CORNER				
LINE						LEFT CORNER				
CENTER						SAFETY				
TE						SAFETY				
OFFENSE						DEFENSE				

Team Roster (spilt with half – Heavier half Bigs, Lighter half Littles)

Player (Number)	Bigs (weight)	Player (Number)	Littles (weigh)	