



SOUTH MILWAUKEE RECREATION DEPARTMENT

2026 Youth Flag Football Rules & Guidelines



This year the Rec Dept. will adopt some of the rules and guidelines offered by the USA Official Rookie Tackle Football program. A small-sided version of the sport is a bridge game between flag and tackle football.

RECREATION DEPARTMENT GAME PHILOSOPHY

This instructional program is set up for children to have fun while learning and developing skills. It is to be viewed as something other than a highly competitive program emphasizing winning.



All players who attend practices should play a minimum of one-half in the game.

PLAYER ELIGIBILITY

All players must participate in their own combined grade division. A player may play on only one team. New players may be added to the roster after the deadline. Non-residents will be eligible to play.

THE GOAL OF FLAG FOOTBALL

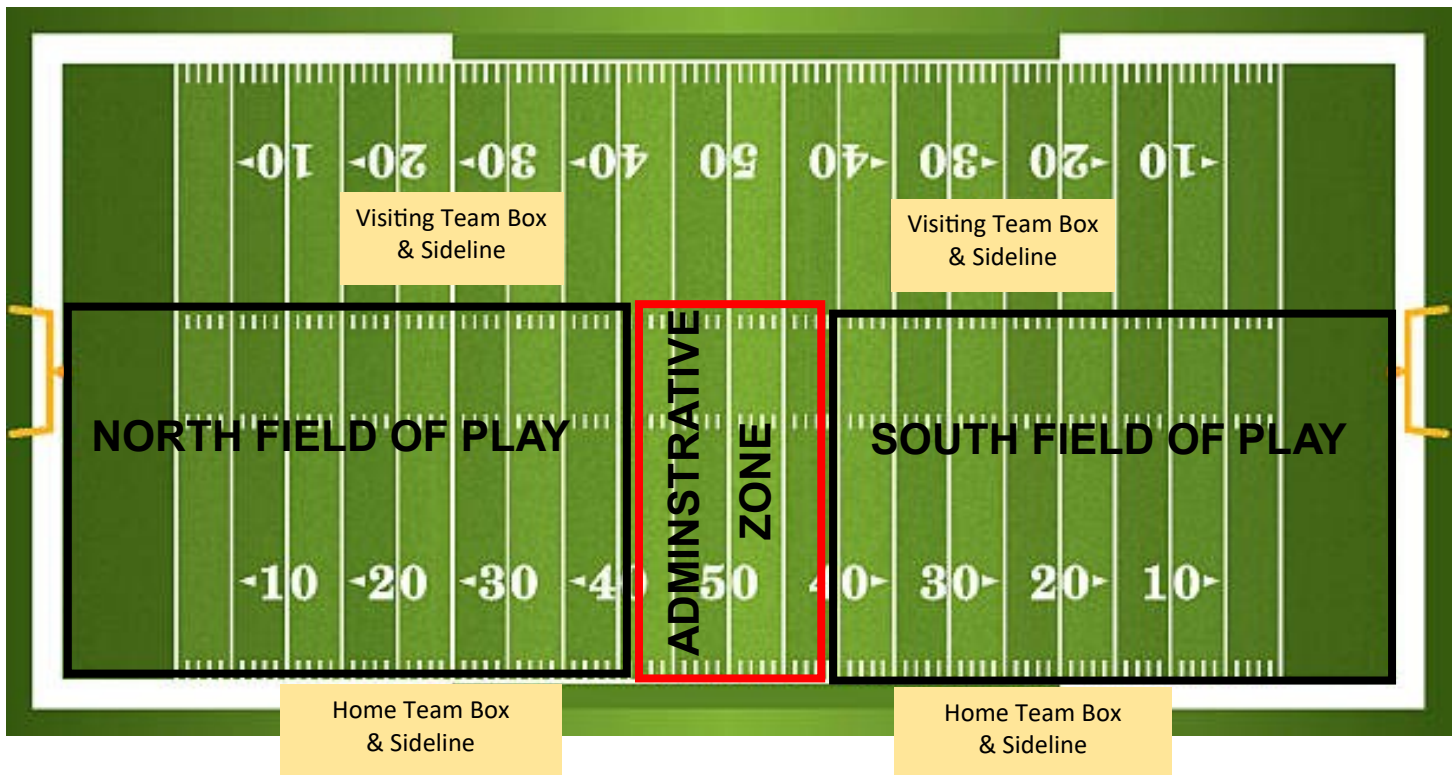
- Increase teams' coach-to-player ratio
- Play in an age-appropriate space
- Lessen the number of players on the field
- We are emphasizing fundamental skill development by isolating situations for players to display their abilities.
- Foster a fun, positive experience for young players
- In practice, players should learn all skills of all positions for development purposes.
- Ensuring all players have meaningful playing time and the opportunity for improvement and success during game action. Fewer players on the sideline mean fewer substitutions and more playing time for each athlete.
- This program moves at a fast-paced with more plays, greater activity, and kids will have more fun.
- Maximize field space by playing two games on one regulation-sized football field.
- Limit team rosters to foster participation and provide more focused, individualized coaching attention during practice and on game day. Roster caps are recommended at two times the number of players on the field (meaning playing 8-on-8 should cap rosters at 16). Smaller rosters are preferred.

These are just some of the factors that allow coaches to dedicate greater attention to skill development, and a greater focus on teaching these skills to young players and to help players understand and learn foundational skills, helping them to transition to tackle and regulation-sized fields.

FIELD OF PLAY

- 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 simultaneously.
- One sideline is traditional, and the other extends along the inside of the far side hash on a standard football field and must be marked with cones every five yards. The goal line and the back line of the end zone are marked with orange pylons.
- All possessions start at the 40-yard line going toward the end zone. This leaves a 20-yard buffer zone between the two game fields for game administration and safety purposes. Game officials, league personnel, and designated coaches are allowed in this space.
- The offensive huddle may take place in the administrative Zone.
- Players not in the game stand on the sidelines with one or more coaches to supervise.
- The players' box should be used for sideline players. The field split in two keeps players between the 10 and 35-yard line on each respective field and side.

THE FIELD



West Bleachers—Spectator Seating Area

YARDS & DOWN TO GAIN

A team will have four (4) downs to advance the ball to the next 10-yard division line (zone) and receive a first down. The 10 yard division lines are at the 30, 20, and 10 yard line. The zones are 10 yards wide. The four 10-yard zones, plus the 10-yard end-zone constitute the playing area.

GAME TIMING LENGTH OF THE GAME

- Play will consist of 2-20 minute halves and a 3-minute halftime. The referee's time will be official. A running clock will be in effect at all times except for the last 30 seconds of each half, when the clock will run according to regulation. The official time will also stop for injury, but the team will be charged a timeout that may carry over to the 2nd half.
- Each team is entitled to two 1-minute timeouts each half. Timeouts will not carry over into the second half. Timeouts may be used at any time.
- No Overtime - if the game ends in a tie, the game is over.
- The offensive team has 25 seconds to snap the ball once the ball has been spotted after the previous play has been ruled dead. The offensive team shall be responsible for retrieving the ball after each play. The referee will indicate by signaling to the offensive team when 10 seconds remain on the 15-second clock.
- All games will start as scheduled. However, a 5-minute grace period will be allowed for the first game scheduled.

STARTING EACH GAME

- A coin toss will determine the first possession. The team that wins the coin toss can choose to take the ball or defer to the second half. If the team defers to the second half, they will play defense first.
- There will be **no kickoffs** to start play. The team receiving the ball at the start of the game or after any touchdown will start the ball at the 40-yard line. The offensive team takes possession of the ball at its 40-yard line and has four (4) plays to make a first down. If the offense fails to score, the ball changes possession, and the new offensive team takes over at the 40-yard line.

- When teams arrive at the field, coaches should decide what color flags their team should wear.
- A regulation team shall consist of eight (8) players.
- All teams must have at least six (6) players to start or finish a game. We intend to play a game even if a team lacks players. Players from the other team should be used so that a game can be played.

SCORING

- Offensive touchdowns are worth six points.
 - PATs are the coach's choice—a one-point try is from the three-yard line; a two-point try is from the five-yard line.
 - With no special teams, there are no field goal attempts.
1. There are no defensive touchdowns, as all turnovers are blown dead immediately. No returns are allowed.

GAME PROCEDURES

- Officials will have complete jurisdiction over the game, and their decision will be final.
- Each team must provide a volunteer to operate the down marker for one half.
- There are no jersey numbers or player positions restrictions.
- A turnover on downs brings the ball back to the 40-yard line, and the teams switch sides from offense to defense, and defense to offense.
- Turnovers are blown dead immediately. No returns are allowed to protect players. The play restarts on the 40-yard line with the recovering/intercepting team on offense. There are no defensive touchdowns.
- There are no fumbles. When the ball carriers lose control, and the ball touches the ground, the play is ruled dead, and the ball is spotted at the point it touched the ground.
- There are no 3 or 4 point stances.
- Teams are expected to report to the playing site when there is questionable weather. Games will only be canceled because of lightning and thunder or severe heavy rain, tornado siren, or unplayable field conditions.
- Canceled games will not be rescheduled.
- There are no special teams.
- 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.

EQUIPMENT

- The Recreation Department will provide yard markers, game footballs, and down marker. Each team should supply their flags. The rec dept. will have additional flags on site.
- **Champro FB 400, Pee Wee Football** will be used in the 2nd & 3rd-grade division.
- **Champro CT7, Junior Football** will be used in the 4th & 5th-grade division.
- No metal cleats allowed. Tennis shoes/rubber cleats are recommended.
- Jewelry may not be worn during practice or games. Taping studded earrings is not permissible. Studs must be removed.
- We use a two (2) Flag system, and they must be worn hanging down on the sides of the hips and along the leg. They must be hanging loose and fully extended and may not be knotted or tucked in the pants or pockets or inside out. The flag belt may not be inside the belt loops on the pants. Shirts or jerseys must be tucked into the pants at all times.
- A mouthguard is required.



RUSHING THE PASSER

- There is a 5-second delay before linemen can rush the quarterback. Blitzes are NOT allowed.

COACHING

- All coaches must be 18 or older and out of high school.
- At the start of the game, the head coach shall identify themselves to the game official.
- All coaches must cooperate to ensure that spectators do not interfere with the conduct of the game.
- Each team is allowed ONE (1) offensive coach in the huddle that must move back 5-yards from the line of scrimmage, and one (1) defensive coach must move back 10-yards from the line of scrimmage. This is intended to facilitate instruction and faster play calling to keep the game's speed and activity levels high. Once the huddle is broken, the on-field coaches may assist the officials in alignment issues, as the goal is development, not persistent penalties.
- After the huddle is broken, there is to be no extra instruction, audibles, or changing of plays allowed. Additional coaching after the huddle break will result in one warning, and any continued infractions will result in a penalty. This rule is enforced per team, not per individual coach.
- Teams can rotate which coaches are on the field at any time.
- An adult coach must remain with the team during all practice sessions and league games both on the game field and sideline.

NEUTRAL ZONE AND PLAYER ALIGNMENT

- Defensive players must line up 2- yards (6') behind the line of scrimmage on all plays. A two (2)-yard-neutral zone has been established between the offensive and defensive lines.
- At least 5 players must be on the line of scrimmage with 8-man football (offense & defense) when the ball is snapped at all times. If a team only has 7 or 6 players present, then they must have 4 or 3 players on the line of scrimmage.
- All line players must set up **man-to-man** on the line of scrimmage.
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- The ends must play at most 5-yards from the tackle. An unbalanced line is permitted. A man-in-motion is NOT allowed.
- Remember: there is a 5-second delay before linemen can rush the quarterback. Blitzes are NOT allowed.

FORWARD PASS

- The offensive team is only allowed one forward pass, which is to occur behind the line of scrimmage.
- All players are eligible for a pass.
- Only one (1) forward pass per play. One foot down in bounds = completion.

THE SNAP

- The player centering the ball may NOT be touched until after centering the ball.
- 2nd & 3rd graders have the option of centering the ball from the side.
- 4th & 5th graders must center the ball through their legs.
- No offensive player, while on the scrimmage line, may receive a snap.
- Any center snap that falls and touches the ground will be ruled dead at the spot where the ball hits the ground.
- All players of both the offense and the defense, except the snapper, must be on their feet with neither hand touching the ground at the snap. Players' hands on their knees is permissible.
- The snapper, after assuming the position for the snap and adjusting the ball, may not move or change the position of the ball in a manner simulating the beginning of a play. An infraction of this provision may be penalized whether or not the ball is snapped and the penalty for any resultant encroachment or contact foul by an opponent shall be cancelled.
- At least 3 players on the offensive line with 6 players, 4 players on the offensive line with 7 players, and 5 players on the offensive line with 8 players. The remaining offensive players must be behind the line of scrimmage their backfield.
- All players must be in bounds and only the snapper may be encroaching on the neutral zone, but no part of their persons may be beyond the neutral zone and their feet must be stationary behind the ball.
- No player of the offensive team shall make a false start. A false start includes feigning a charge, or a play. An infraction of this rule may be penalized whether or not the ball is snapped and the penalty for any resultant encroachment or contact foul by an opponent may be canceled.
- In a snap preceded by a huddle or shift, all players of the offense must come to a complete stop and remain stationary in legal position without layer may be in motion, but not in motion toward the opponent's goal line. If such player starts from the scrimmage line, player must be at least 5-yards behind that line when the ball is snapped- other offensive players must be stationary in their positions without movement of the feet, body, head or arms.

FLAGS

- Each player on the field will wear a belt at the waistline with two (2) flags attached, but not tied thereto one flag on each side of the body. Each flag should extend or hang from the waist a minimum of 14 inches. Flags should be 3 inches wide and 16 to 20 inches long.
- Flag must be worn hanging down on the sides of the hips and along the leg. They must hang loose and fully extended, and may not be knotted or tucked in the pants or pockets, or inside out. The flag belt may not be inside the belt loops on the pants.
- Wrapping, tying, or in any way securing the flags to the uniform or belt, other than prescribed by rule, or intentionally removing a flag during play is illegal.

ENFORCEMENT OF PENALTIES SECTION

- Because of the limited field size, all 10-yard penalties are enforced as 5-yard penalties, and all 5-yard penalties are enforced as 2-yard penalties.
- A penalty called and accepted cannot go beyond 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. No offensive penalty can take the ball beyond the 40-yard line.
- If a flag is pulled behind the 40-yard line, the ball is re-spotted at the 40-yard line, with the offense retaining the ball as long as a down remains.
- After a penalty which leaves the ball in possession of Team A beyond its line-to-gain, or when a penalty stipulates a first down, the down and distance established by that penalty shall be first down with next zone to gain.

PENALTIES

- 5-yard penalties become 2-yard penalties: flag guarding, stiff arm, delay of game, off sides, offensive holding, encroachment, impeding the rusher, offensives pass interference, holding, stripping the ball carrier, roughing the passer, illegal contact etc.
- 10-yard penalties become 5-yard penalties: bull rush, tackling or tripping the ball carrier, defensive pass interference, unsportsmanlike conduct etc.

DEFLAGGING

- Deflagging is the legal removal of a flag from an opponent in possession of the ball. A foot of the DE flagger must be in contact with the ground throughout the deflagging. Pushing, striking, holding, or slapping are not permitted.
- When the flag is cleanly taken from a ball carrier the down shall end and the ball is declared dead. A player who removes the flag from the ball carrier should immediately hold the flag above his head to assist the official in locating the spot where the capture occurred.
- Offensive players must have possession of the ball before they can legally be deflagged.
- In an attempt to remove a flag from a ball carrier, defensive players may contact the body and shoulders of an opponent with their hands, but not their face or any part of their head. A defensive player may not hold, push, or knock the ball carrier down in an attempt to remove the flag.
- Tackling a ball carrier is illegal, as is aggressively shoving or pushing the ball carrier to the ground or out of bounds. Repeated attempts to tackle a ball carrier may result in an ejection.

DEAD BALL

- It is a dead ball if the ball carrier falls to the ground.
- It is a dead ball if the ball carrier loses the flag.
- It is a dead ball when a ball carrier has a flag removed legally by a defensive player
- It is a dead ball on an incomplete pass, or if the ball carrier goes out of bounds.
- It is a dead ball if the ball is fumbled. The opponent cannot recover a fumble.
- It is a dead ball if the snap hits the ground.
- It is a dead ball when the ball carrier goes out-of-bounds or when it crosses the goal line.

*Just
for
Fun*

DEFENSIVE HOLDING

- Defensive holding occurs when a defender grabs the ball carrier and impedes his forward progress. This includes when the defender attempts to pull a flag and misses and grabs the ball carrier's shorts or shirt.

OFFSIDES

- A lineman will be considered offside when they break the neutral zone before the snap, even if no contact is made with the opponent. You are not allowed to jump back. 2-yard penalty and replay the down.

FLAG GUARDING

- Flag guarding is defined as any attempt by the ball carrier to shield their flags from being pulled. This includes but is not limited to swinging a free hand, pushing an opponent's hand away, holding flags with a free hand, lowering or dipping their shoulder, and using the ball to shield the flag.

STIFF-ARMING

- Stiff-arming is illegal and will draw an unnecessary roughness penalty. This will be a 10-yard penalty from the spot of the foul.

SPINNING

- At no time may a ball carrier spin to avoid a defensive player. Spinning (top-like) is not permitted. This is separate from turning. This will be a judgment call.

DIVING

- At no time may a ball carrier leave his feet to advance the ball. Diving will be at the sole discretion of the referee.

STRIPPING THE BALL

Players attempting to strip the ball and not attempting to pull a flag are subject to a personal foul penalty.

ENCROACHMENT

- Encroachment is a term to indicate a player is illegally in the neutral zone before the ball is legally snapped.

TO MANY PLAYERS ON THE FIELD

- More players on the field will result in a loss of down if on offense or a replay of down if your team is on defense. Coaches must try to avoid this situation from occurring.

BLOCKING

Blocking legally obstructs an opponent by contacting the opponent with any part of the blocker/s body.

Players shall be limited to the following:

- The offense may extend arms in front of them but not to the sides. The defense must go around the defender. It is a penalty if they use hands/arms or go through the defender.
- In all instances blockers must be on their feet when blocking. Accidentally falling when attempting a block is not illegal.
- The blocker's hands may not be locked.
- The blocker may not swing, throw, or flip the elbow or forearm.
- The hands may be closed or cupped while blocking.
- There shall be no two on one blocking at any time.
- Blocking below the waist is illegal. Penalty: 7-yards.
- The blocker may not initiate contact against an opponent with his arm or hand above the opponents shoulders.

Clipping

Clipping is running or diving into the back, or throwing or dropping the body across the back of the leg or legs of an opponent, or pushing an opponent in the back other than the runner any place on the field. Cases involving a side block or an opponent turning their back to the blocker are to be judged according to whether the player being blocked was able to see or ward off the blocker.

Tripping

- Tripping is using the lower leg or foot to obstruct an opponent (including the ball carrier) below the knee. All unsportsmanlike conduct penalties include an required **immediately 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."

DELIBERATE OR FLAGRANT FOULS

Whenever, in the judgment of any game official, the following acts are deliberate or flagrant, the players involved shall be suspended from the game:

- Using fists, kicking or kneeling.
- Using locked hands, elbows, or any part of the forearm or hand, except according to rule.
- Tackling the ball carrier as in regulation football.
- Any other deliberate or flagrant act.

USING ANY ACT OF UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT INCLUDING

- Abusive or insulting language or gestures.
- Fighting
- Any acts of unfair play.
- Managers, coaches or team attendants on the field of play at any time without permission, or their interference of any nature with the progress of the game.
- A substitute or any other person interfering with a player or any play while the ball is alive
- Using a "hide out play" by placing a player or players near the side line who were not within 15-Yards of the ball at the ready-for-play signal
- Attempting to substitute a suspended player'
- Spiking ball, taunting opponent or other similar theatrics before or after a touchdown'
- Pulling or removing a flag from an offensive player without the ball by a defensive player intentionally or inadvertently.

Any player or coach ejected from a game will be suspended from the next league game, a two or more games suspension may be given, depending on the severity of the offense. Any player ejected from a game for fighting, retaliation, and leaving the bench to enter a fight, can be suspended for the remainder of the session. Should these incidents occur in the session's final game, that player will be suspended for the next session.

UNFAIR ACTS

If a team refuses to play within two (2) minutes after ordered to play by the referee, or if play is interfered with by an obviously unfair or unsportsmanlike act not specifically covered by the rules; or if a team repeatedly commits fouls which can be penalized only by halving the distance to the goal line, or if a team commits any act which, in the opinion of the referee, tends to make a travesty of the game, the referee may enforce any penalty he consider, "equitable.



CONDUCT & DISCIPLINE

- When participating, teams, players, managers, and coaches acknowledge that they are acquainted with and will abide by league rules as a condition of this privilege.
- Coaches and players are responsible for their conduct before, during, and after league games.
- Only the coaches and the field captain will be allowed to question the decision of the officials. Coaches must keep players or spectators away from the sidelines. **Spectator must sit in the bleachers.**
- All player, coach, or spectator warnings because of unsportsmanlike conduct will be considered a team's warning. A second offense will result in a player, coach, or spectator ejection from the contest and area. A third offense will result in a forfeit.
- Spectators must also adhere to the rules of conduct.
- Spectators should remain in the spectator's area (bleachers) during the contest.
- Spectators should not yell instructions or criticism at the players.
- Spectators should not interfere or make derogatory remarks to players, coaches, other spectators, game officials, or field supervisors. Violating this rule will result in removing the spectator from the contest area.

PLAYER RESTRICTIONS

- No player shall block in a manner that would cause his or her feet, knees or legs to strike an opponent. All blocking shall be done with the feet in contact with the ground.
- There shall be no high-low blocking.
- There shall be no two-on-one blocking.
- There shall be no tripping; there shall be no clipping.
- There shall be no contact with an opponent who is on the ground.
- The runner shall not be thrown to the ground.
- There shall be no hurdling. hurdling shall be interpreted as an attempt by the runner to jump over a player with both feet or knees of the runner foremost.
- No player shall contact an opponent obviously out of the play either before or after the ball is declared dead.
- There shall be no unnecessary roughness or contact with an opponent.
- The ball carrier shall not deliberately run into a defensive player.
- The ball carrier shall not grasp a teammate or be grasped, pulled or pushed by a teammate.
- The offensive team shall be prohibited from obstructing an opponent with extended hand or arm. This includes the use of a "stiff-arm" extended to ward off an opponent attempting to deflag.
- The defensive player shall not hold, grasp, or obstruct forward progress of a ball carrier when in the act of removing a Flag.
- No player may leave the ground with both feet in an attempt to gain possession of a ball.
- Ball carrier shall not protect their flags by blocking with arms or hands the opportunity of an opponent to pull or remove a flag.
- No defensive player shall use their hands or arms to grasp or hold an opponent other than the runner.
- No defensive player shall use their hand(s) or forearm(s) to strike a blow to the head.
- No defensive player shall use their hands to add momentum to a teammate by shoving him.



POINTS OF EMPHASIS

1. No player may assume a three point stance.
2. Receiver must have one foot in bounds when catching ball.
3. The offensive team may make as many passes as desired from behind their line of scrimmage.
4. Hideout plays (where a player pretends to go out of bounds) are illegal.
5. No leaving feet to block, tag or remove flag.
6. The ball must not be raised to more than 45 angle when snapped.
7. When a flag is removed from a ball carrier by an opponent the down ends. A player who removes a flag should immediately hold it above his/her head.
8. If a flag of the ball carrier inadvertently falls to the ground, a one hand touch between the shoulders and the knees constitutes a removal.
9. The offensive team is only allowed (1) forward pass per play, which is to occur behind the line of scrimmage.
10. All players of both teams are eligible to touch or catch a pass.
11. Quarterback sneaks are prohibited in all situations.
12. All possessions start at the 40-yard line going toward the end zone.
13. Turnovers are blown dead immediately. No returns are allowed to protect players. The play restarts on the 40-yard line with the recovering/intercepting team on offense. **There are no defensive touchdowns.**
14. **There are no fumbles.** When the ball carriers lose control, and the ball touches the ground, the play is ruled dead, and the ball is spotted at the point it touched the ground.
15. There are no special teams.
16. 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.
17. A mouthguard is required.
18. Each team is allowed ONE (1) offensive coach in the huddle that must move back 5-yards from the line of scrimmage, and one (1) defensive coach must move back 10-yards from the line of scrimmage. This is intended to facilitate instruction and faster play calling to keep the game's speed and activity levels high. Once the huddle is broken, the on-field coaches may assist the officials in alignment issues, as the goal is development, not persistent penalties.
19. Defensive players must line up 2 yards (6') behind the line of scrimmage on all plays. A two (2)-yard-neutral zone has been established between the offensive and defensive lines.
20. At least 5 players must be on the line of scrimmage with 8-man football (offense & defense) when the ball is snapped at all times. If a team only has 7 or 6 players present, then they must have 4 or 3 players on the line of scrimmage.
21. All line players must set up **man-to-man** on the line of scrimmage.

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22. The ends must play at most 5-yards from the tackle. An unbalanced line is permitted.
23. 2nd & 3rd graders have the option of centering the ball from the side.
24. 4th & 5th graders must centering the ball through their legs.
25. At no time may a ball carrier spin to avoid a defensive player..
26. Remember: there is a 5-second delay before linemen can rush the quarterback. Blitzes are NOT allowed.

WEEKLY PRACTICE AND CONTACT LIMITS

Flag Football coaches should limit practices to two (2) days per week, 1.5 hours per day.

INJURY

The South Milwaukee Recreation Department shall not be responsible for any injury incurred. The Recreation Department recommends that all players obtain their insurance and that all teams provide their 1st Aid equipment with the needed supplies