

# 2021 LINCOLN YOUTH FLAG FOOTBALL



## OFFICIAL RULE BOOK



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# Rules

## I. Game

1. At the start of each game, captains from both teams shall meet at midfield for the coin toss to determine the first possession. The visiting team will call heads or tails for the coin flip.
2. The winner of the coin toss gets to choose to start on offense or defense. The loser of the coin toss chooses which direction they would like to start. Teams may choose to defer to the second half.
3. The offensive team takes possession of the ball at its own 5-yard line and has three downs (plays) to cross midfield. Once a team crosses midfield, it has an additional three downs to score a touchdown.
4. If the offense fails to get a first down or score, the ball changes possession and the new offensive team takes over on its own 5-yard line.
5. All possession changes, except interceptions, start on the offense's 5-yard line.
6. Teams change sides at the start of the second half. Possession changes to the team that started the game on defense.

## II. Terminology

- **Boundary lines** – the outer perimeter lines around the field. They include the sidelines, and the rear end zone lines.
- **Line of Scrimmage** – an imaginary line running through the point of the football and across the width of the field.
- **Line-To-Gain** – the line the offense must pass to get a first down or score.
- **Rush Line** – an imaginary line running across the width of the field 10 yards (into the defensive side) from the line of scrimmage.
- **Offense** – the team with possession of the ball.
- **Defense** – the team opposing the offense to prevent them from advancing the ball.
- **Passer** – the offensive player that throws the ball and may or may not be the QB.
- **Rusher** – the defensive player assigned to rush the Quarterback to prevent them from passing by pulling their flags.
- **Downs** – the offensive team has three downs to advance the ball. They must cross the line to gain to receive another set of downs.
- **Live Ball** – the period of time that the play is in action. Generally used in regards to penalties, Live Ball Penalties are considered part of the play and must be enforced before the down is considered complete.
- **Dead Ball** – the period of time immediately before or after a play.
- **Inadvertent whistle** – an official's whistle that is performed in error. See #9 on page 6 for process after an inadvertent whistle.
- **Charging** – movement of the ball carrier making contact with the defender including lowering the head, shoulder, chest or forearm.
- **Flag Guarding** – an act by the ball carrier to prevent a defender from pulling their flags by stiff arm, lowering elbow or hand swipe.
- **Shovel Pass** – a legal pass attempted *behind* the line of scrimmage by throwing the ball underhand or pushing it towards a receiver *past* the line of scrimmage.
- **Unsportsmanlike Conduct** – rude, confrontational, offensive behavior or language towards other players, officials, coaches or fans.

### III. Eligibility

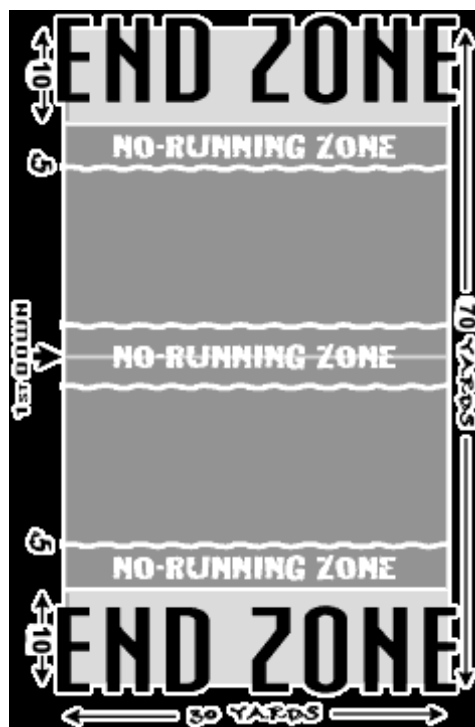
1. A player's age must fall within the specified age and grade range as of September 1st of the current year.
2. All players must fill out and complete a waiver that is signed by a legal guardian or parent.

### IV. Equipment

1. The League provides each team with flag belts and practice footballs. A game ball will be pre-determined.
2. Players must wear shoes. Cleats are allowed, however cleats with exposed metal are not allowed and must be removed.
3. Players may tape their forearms, hands and fingers. Players may wear gloves, elbow pads, and kneepads. Braces with exposed metal are not allowed.
4. Players must remove all watches, earrings and any other jewelry that the officials deem hazardous.
5. Official league jerseys must be worn during play, unless otherwise approved by the league.
6. Players' jerseys must be tucked into the pants if they hang below the belt line.
7. Pants or shorts with belt loops or pockets must be taped.
8. Mouth guards are required for all players.

### V. Field

1. The field size is 32 yards wide by 70 yards long with two 10-yard end zones and a midfield line-to-gain. No-Running Zones precede each line-to-gain by 5 yards.
2. No Run Zones are in place to prevent teams from conducting power run plays. While in the No Run Zones (a 5 yard imaginary zone before midfield and before the endzone marked with a dashed line), teams may not run the ball. All plays, including those that begin with a handoff, must be passing plays. If a penalty is called on the offense inside the no run-zone that takes them out of the run zone they must abide by the no Run zone policy.
3. Stepping on the boundary line is considered out of bounds.
4. Each offensive team approaches only TWO No Run Zones in each drive (one zone 5 yards from midfield to gain the first down, one zone 5 yards from the goal line to score a TD).
5. If the offense passes the midfield line to gain, and then goes backwards due to lost yards on a play or penalty, they do not get another first down by passing midfield again. They must score within the next three plays.



### VI. Rosters

1. Home teams wear dark jerseys, visiting teams wear light jerseys.
2. Teams must field a minimum of four (4) players at all times.

## VII. Timing and Overtime

1. Games will consist of two, 20 minute halves running clock with a 2-Minute Warning. The clock stops only for timeouts and briefly for the ball placement following a change of possession. The clock will restart once the ball is placed.
2. Halftime is three - five minutes long depending on time availability.
3. Each time the ball is spotted, a team has 30 seconds to snap the ball. After 30 seconds a delay-of-game penalty is called.
4. Each team has one, 60-second time out per half.
5. Officials can stop the clock at their discretion.
6. In the event of an injury the clock will stop and then restart when the injured player is removed from the field of play.
7. In the event of a tie at the end of regulation, an overtime period will be used to determine a winner. OT format is as follows:
  - a. Each team gets at least one series of three plays to score starting from the 12 yard line (2 point conversion point).
    - i. Winner of the regulation coin toss chooses to start on offense or defense. Opponent chooses direction.
    - ii. There is no sudden death, each team gets a minimum of one possession.
    - iii. . If the first offensive team does not score, the defensive team takes possession of the ball on the 12-yard line.
    - iiii. If then, the second offensive team scores, the game is over. If they also do not score, the process is repeated.
    - iv. . If the process repeats three times and a tie remains, the games will be scored a draw.
  - b. In the case of an interception, the play may continue and is not dead, a return for a touchdown ends the game.
    - i. If the first offense scores, and then goes to defense and intercepts the ball, the game is over.
    - ii. . If the first offense does not score, and then goes to defense and intercepts the ball, the ball can be returned for a game ending score. If the player does not score on the interception the period is over.
  - c. All regulation period rules and penalties are in effect.
  - d. There are no time-outs in any overtime period.

## VIII. Scoring

1. Touchdown: **6 points**
2. PAT (Point After Touchdown)
  - a. **1 point** (5-yard line) Has to be a passing play, no running plays are allowed.
  - b. **2 points** (12-yard line) Can be a running or passing play.
3. Safety: **2 points**
  - a. A Safety occurs when the ball carrier is declared down in their own end zone. They can be called down when their flags are pulled by a defensive player, their flag falls out, they step out of bounds or they hit the ground with their knee or arm. A Safety also occurs when there is an offensive penalty or if the ball is dropped or fumbled in the end zone.
4. A team that scores a touchdown must declare whether it wishes to attempt a 1-pt. conversion (from the 5-yard line) or a 2-pt. conversion (from the 12-yard line). Interceptions on conversions can be returned for the designated amount of points (1 or 2).
5. Mercy Rule: After a team is winning by 21 points or more, the game will be played out but the scoreboard will be cleared, until the games differential falls back to 21 points or under.

## IX. Coaches

1. Coaches are typically volunteer parents or family members helping the players learn and enjoy the game. Parents are encouraged to support the coach at all times.
2. For the 1st & 2nd grade division, 1 coach is allowed on the field and in the huddle for offense and defense. After the offensive team breaks the huddle, coaches must stay far back behind the line of scrimmage. After the defensive team breaks the huddle, coaches must move over towards the sideline.
3. For the 3rd & 4th grade division, 1 coach is allowed in the huddle and on the field for offense only. After the team breaks the huddle, coaches must stay far back behind the line of scrimmage. Coaches in this age group are not allowed on the field while playing defense. All coaches for all other age groups must stay on the sidelines at all times unless it's during a timeout. (A defensive coach can remain on the field during the first four weeks of play).
4. Coaches are expected to adhere to the City of Lincoln Recreation Department coaching guidelines and code of conduct policy.
5. Only coaches that have fully completed the proper paperwork and attended the coaches meeting and training are allowed on the field unless given permission from the league administrator. All assistant coaches must be approved by the league.
6. Only three coaches per team are allowed on the sidelines. All parents and spectators are required to stay on the outside of the designated coaches area. Coaches will be held responsible for their parent's actions.

## X. Live Ball/Dead Ball

1. The ball is live at the snap of the ball and remains live until the official whistles the play dead.
2. The sideline official will indicate the neutral zone and line of scrimmage. It is an automatic dead ball foul if any player on defense or offense enters the neutral zone. In regards to the neutral zone, the official may give both teams a "courtesy" offside warning to allow players to move back beyond the line of scrimmage.
3. A player who gains possession in the air is considered in bounds as long as one foot comes down in the field of play.
4. The defense may not mimic the offensive team signals, by trying to confuse the offensive players, while the quarterback is calling out signals to start the play.
5. Substitutions may be made on any dead ball.
6. Any official can whistle the play dead.
7. There are no fumbles of any kind. The ball is spotted where the ball hits the ground.
8. Play is ruled "dead" when:
  - a. The ball hits the ground at any time.
  - b. The ball carrier's flag is pulled.
  - c. The ball carrier's flag falls out.
  - d. The ball carrier's knee or arm (excluding the hand to balance and stay standing) hits the ground.
  - e. The receiver catches the ball while in possession of only one flag.
  - f. The ball carrier steps out of bounds.
  - g. A touchdown, PAT or safety is scored.
  - h. The 7 second pass clock expires.
  - i. An inadvertent whistle is performed.
9. In the case of an inadvertent whistle, the offense has two options:
  - a. Take the ball where the whistle blew.
  - b. Replay the down from the original line of scrimmage.
10. A team is allowed to use a time out to question an official's rule interpretation. If the rule is interpreted incorrectly, the time out will not be charged and the proper ruling will be enforced. Officials should all agree upon any controversial call in order to give each team the full benefit of each call. If the ruling was correct, the team in question will be charged a time out

## **XI. Running**

1. The ball is spotted where the runner's feet are when the flag is pulled, not where the ball carrier has the ball. If one foot precedes the other, the forward foot marks the spot.
2. The quarterback cannot directly run past the line of scrimmage with the ball.
3. Direct handoffs behind the line of scrimmage are permitted. Offense may use multiple handoffs.
4. Absolutely NO laterals. Pitches are OK if made backwards behind the line of scrimmage ONLY. Ball is dead if dropped.
5. "No-Run Zones," located 5 yards before the end zone and 5 yards before midfield, are designed to avoid short-yardage, power-running situations. Teams are not allowed to run in these zones IF the subsequent line is LIVE. (Reminder: Each offensive team approaches only TWO No Run Zones in each drive - one, 5 yards from midfield to gain the first down, and one, 5 yards from the goal line to score a TD).
6. If the offense passes the midfield line to gain, and then goes backwards due to lost yards on a play or penalty, they do not get another first down by passing midfield again. They must score within the next 2-3 plays.
7. The player who takes the handoff can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage.
8. NO direct handoffs to the center
9. Once the ball has been handed off in front or behind the quarterback, all defensive players are eligible to rush.
10. Runners may not leave their feet to advance the ball. Diving, leaping or jumping is considered flag guarding.
11. Spinning is allowed, but players cannot dive or jump to avoid a flag pull or try to score a touchdown.
12. Runners may leave their feet if there is a clear indication that he/she has done so to avoid collision with another player without a flag guarding penalty enforced.
13. No blocking or "screening" is allowed at any time.
14. Offensive players without the ball must stop once the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage. No running with the ball carrier
15. Flag Obstruction – All jerseys MUST be tucked in before play begins. The flags must be on the player's hips and free from obstruction. The extra belt in the middle must be tucked away. Deliberately obstructed flags will be considered flag guarding.

## **XII. Passing**

1. All passes must be from behind the line of scrimmage, thrown forward and received beyond the line of scrimmage.
  - A pass may be thrown behind the line of scrimmage, in that event the defense may cross the line of scrimmage upon release of the ball
2. Shovel passes are allowed, but must be received at/or beyond the line of scrimmage.
3. The quarterback has a seven-second "pass clock." If a pass is not thrown within the seven seconds, the play is dead, the offense receives a 5 yard penalty and loss of down. Once the ball is handed off, the 7-second rule is no longer in effect.
  - a. If the QB is standing in the end zone at the end of the 7-second clock, the down is consumed, and the offense receives a penalty of half the distance to the goal line.
4. The quarterback may handoff to another player, as long as that player stays behind the line of scrimmage they can pass to another teammate. Multiple handoffs may be made, after a handoff the 7-second rule is no longer in effect.
5. Once the ball is thrown forward it may not be thrown forward again or tossed backwards (ie hook and ladder).

## **XIII. Receiving**

1. All receptions must be past or at the line of scrimmage.
  - Amended rule: passes may be thrown behind the line of scrimmage (considered a lateral)
2. All players are eligible to receive passes (including the quarterback if the ball has been handed off behind the LOS).
3. Only one player is allowed in motion at a time. All players in motion must be parallel to the line of scrimmage and no motion is permitted towards the line of scrimmage.
4. A player must have at least one foot inbounds when making a reception.
5. In the case of simultaneous possession by both an offensive and defensive player, possession is awarded to the offense.
6. Interceptions are returnable.
7. Interceptions change the possession of the ball and are spotted where the defensive player's flag is pulled or where they step out of bounds. Interceptions are the only changes of possession that do not start on the 5-yard line.
8. Passes in the "No Running" zone must be completed at or beyond the line of scrimmage.

## XIV. Rushing the Passer

1. All players who rush the passer must be a minimum of 10 yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped. Any number of players can rush the quarterback. Players not rushing the quarterback may defend on the line of scrimmage.
2. Once the ball is handed off, the 10 yard rule is no longer in effect and all defenders may go behind the line of scrimmage.
3. A special marker, or the referee, will designate a Rush Line 10 yards from the line of scrimmage. Defensive players should verify they are in the correct position with the official on every play.
  - a. A legal rush is:
    - i. Any rush from a point 10 yards from the defensive line of scrimmage.
    - ii. . A rush from anywhere on the field AFTER the ball has been handed off by the quarterback.
    - iii. A rusher leaves the rush line early, they return to the rush line, then legally rush the quarterback.
    - iv. A rusher leaves the rush line early and the ball is handed off before the rusher crosses the line of scrimmage.
  - b. A penalty **MAY** be called if:
    - i. The rusher leaves the rush line before the snap and crosses the line of scrimmage before a handoff or pass.
    - ii. . Any defensive player crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped.
    - iii. Any defensive player, not lined up at the rush line crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is released.
    - iv. If the rusher leaves his feet past the line of scrimmage.
  - c. Special circumstances:
    - i. Teams are not required to rush the quarterback, 7 second clock is still in effect.
    - ii. Teams are not required to identify their rusher before the play.
    - iii. If a rusher leaves the 10-yard line before the snap, they may immediately drop back to act as a defender with no offside penalty enforced.
4. Players rushing the Quarterback may leave their feet to knock down a ball before the line of scrimmage. Once they cross the line of scrimmage they must remain on their feet but can raise their hands. NO contact can be made with the quarterback in any way, if QB is contacted the resulting penalty is roughing the passer (10 yards from LOS and Automatic First Down).
5. Offense cannot impede the rusher in any way. The rusher has a clear path to the QB and any interference to the QB will be considered screening.
6. Any defensive player trying to simulate the snap will be warned then assessed an Unsportsmanlike Conduct Penalty (10 yards from LOS and Automatic First Down).
7. A Sack occurs if the QB's flags are pulled or fall out behind the line of scrimmage. The ball is placed where the QB's feet are when the flag is pulled.
  - a. A Safety is awarded if the sack takes place in the offensive team's end zone.

## XV. Flag Pulling

1. A legal flag pull takes place when the ball carrier is in full possession of the ball.
2. Defenders can dive to pull flags, but cannot tackle, hold or run through a ball carrier when pulling flags.
  - If a player intentionally tackles another player (wraps up to bring down or lowers shoulder to initiate contact), player will be assessed a 15-yd penalty and on 2<sup>nd</sup> occasion will be asked to sit out the remainder of the half. Any following instances may result in a suspension.
  - Any incidental tackling will result in a warning, followed by a 15-yd penalty, followed by removal from the remainder of the game.
3. It is illegal to attempt to strip or pull the ball, or attempt to pull the ball carrier's arm away from the ball.
4. If a player's flag inadvertently falls off during the play, the player is down immediately upon possession of the ball and the play ends.
5. A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off of a player who is not in possession of the ball.
6. Flag guarding is an attempt by the ball carrier to obstruct the defender's access to the flags by stiff arming, dropping of the head, hand, arm or shoulder, or intentionally covering flags with the football or jersey.



## **XVI. Formations**

- 1.** An offensive team must have a minimum of one player on the line of scrimmage (the Center) and up to four players off the line of scrimmage. The quarterback must be off the line of scrimmage.
  - a. One player at a time may go in motion 1-yard behind and parallel to the line of scrimmage.
  - b. Once a player in motion comes to a complete stop, another offensive player can go in motion.
  - c. No motion is allowed moving forward towards the line of scrimmage.
- 2.** Offensive players must completely stop for one second before the ball is snapped unless they are the player in motion.
- 3.** Movement by a player who is set, or a player who runs toward the line of scrimmage while in motion is considered illegal.
- 4.** The center must snap the ball with a rapid and continuous motion between their legs to a player in the backfield, and the ball must completely leave his/her hands. They may snap by handoff or shotgun toss.

## **XVII. Unsportsmanlike Conduct**

- 1.** If the fields monitor or referee witnesses any acts of intentional tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, blocking, or any other unsportsmanlike act, the game will be stopped and the player will be ejected from the game. The decision is made at the referee's discretion. No appeals! FOUL PLAY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.
- 2.** Offensive or confrontational language is illegal. Officials have the right to determine offensive language. If offensive or confrontational language occurs, the referee will give one warning. If it continues, the player(s) will be ejected from the game.
- 3.** Players may not physically or verbally abuse any opponent or official.
- 4.** Ball carriers MUST make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position.
- 5.** Defenders are not allowed to run through the ball carrier when pulling flags.
- 6.** Fans must also adhere to good sportsmanship:
  - a. Yell to cheer on your players, not to harass officials or other teams.
  - b. Keep comments clean and free of profanity.
  - c. Compliment ALL players, not just one child or team.
- 7.** Fans are required to keep fields safe and kids friendly. Keep younger kids and equipment such as coolers, chairs and tents away from the sidelines.
- 8.** Coaches must adhere to the rules and policies set forth in the league Code of Conduct. Any coach, parent or player that is ejected from a game will automatically be suspended from the following game, and will be reviewed for possible further disciplinary action.
- 9.** If coaches fail to adhere to the "Coaches Code of Conduct" or become verbally abusive towards staff or an official they will be giving "1" warning. After receiving a warning, there will be ZERO tolerance towards a staff or official. If coach continues to be disruptive, abusive or derogatory towards staff or official then game will be suspended, offending team will forfeit and coach will be subjected to league discipline.

## XVIII. Penalties

### i. General:

1. The referee will call all penalties.
2. Referees determine incidental contact that may result from normal run of play.
3. All penalties will be assessed from the line of scrimmage, except as noted (spot fouls).
4. Only the team captain or head coach may ask the referee questions about rule clarification and interpretations. Players and assistant coaches cannot question judgment calls.
5. Games cannot end on a defensive penalty, unless the offense declines it.
6. Penalties are assessed Live Ball then Dead Ball. Live Ball penalties must be assessed before play is considered completed.
7. Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal yardage when the penalty yardage is more than half the distance to the goal.

### ii. 5 Yard Penalties

- Offsides
- Illegal motion (more than one person moving, false start, etc.)
- Illegal forward pass (pass received behind line of scrimmage or throwing a pass from beyond the line of scrimmage)
- Offensive pass interference (illegal pick play, pushing off/away from defender)
- Screening, Blocking or Running with the ball carrier
- Delay of game
- Defense Illegal contact (holding, blocking, etc.)
- Defense Illegal flag pull (before receiver has ball)
- Defense Illegal rushing (starting rush from inside 7-yard marker)

### iii. 10 Yard Penalties

- Flag Guarding
- Roughing the passer
- Taunting
- Unsportsmanlike conduct

### iv. Spot Fouls

- Defensive Pass Interference.....automatic first down
- Flag guarding.....10 yards & loss of down
- Charging.....10 yards & loss of down
- Offensive Unnecessary Roughness.....10 yards & loss of down
- Defensive Unnecessary Roughness.....10 yards & first down
- Stripping.....5 yards & first down
- Screening, Blocking or Running with the ball carrier..... 5 yards & loss of down

### v. Defense

- Offsides.....5 yards from the LOS & automatic first down
- Pass Interference.....Spot Foul & automatic first down
- Illegal contact (Holding, blocking, etc.).....5 yards from the LOS & automatic first down
- Illegal flag pull (Before receiver has ball).....5 yards from the LOS & automatic first down
- Illegal rushing (Starting rush from inside 10-yard marker).....5 yards from the LOS & automatic first down
- Roughing the passer .....10 yards from the LOS & automatic first down
- Unnecessary Roughness.....Spot foul, 10 yards & automatic first down
- Stripping.....Spot foul, 5 yards & automatic first down

### vi. Offense

- Offsides.....5 yards from the LOS, replay down
- 7 Seconds (QB has 7 second to throw a pass otherwise the play is dead)..... 5 yards from the LOS, replay down
- Illegal motion (More than one person moving, false start, etc.)..... 5 yards from the LOS, replay down
- Illegal forward pass (Pass caught behind LOS or throwing a pass from beyond the LOS) ..... 5 yards from the LOS, replay down
- Delay of game.....5 yards from the LOS, replay down
- Pass Interference (Illegal pick play, pushing off) ..... 5 yards from the LOS & loss of down
- Flag guarding.....Spot foul, 10 yards & loss of down
- Charging.....Spot foul, 10 yards & loss of down
- Screening, Blocking or Running with the ball carrier..... Spot foul, 5 yards & loss of down

#### **Rule Changes From 2017**

**UPDATED:** No direct Center handoffs

**UPDATED:** Any defensive player caught simulating and offensive snap will result in a warning and then an Unsportsmanlike Conduct Penalty

**UPDATED:** Overtime will consist of three plays from the 12 yard line and there **WILL** be PAT attempts following a score

#### **Rule Changes From 2016**

**UPDATED:** Interceptions on conversions are returnable for the designated amount of points

**UPDATED:** Rushers may leave their feet prior to the LOS and rush with arms raised once past the LOS

**UPDATED:** Passes behind the LOS are OK, on said passes the defense may cross the LOS upon release of the football

#### **Rule Changes From 2015**

**UPDATED:** A Pitch is a ball tossed backwards behind the line of scrimmage and is OK.

#### **Rule Changes From 2014**

**UPDATED:** If a 7 second pass clock expires, it is a 5-yard penalty and loss of down

**UPDATED:** The scoreboard will no longer show a score difference of more than 21, score will still be kept in the likelihood that a team makes a comeback. Once the score gets within 21, it will be displayed on the scoreboard. Please let you parents know this!!!

**UPDATED:** Overtime - In overtime, interceptions **ARE** returnable.

**UPDATED:** 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> Grade divisions will be 6-on-6

#### **Rule Changes From 2013**

**UPDATED:** 7 second pass clock penalty is now a 5 yard loss and replay the down, instead of staying at the same line of scrimmage and receiving a loss of down.

**UPDATED:** Jumping has been a controversial call over the last couple of seasons. Our main priority is safety but we don't want the offensive player to be too restricted while running with the ball. Little hops or sidesteps are permitted, but a player fully jumping to evade a flag pull is prohibited. The jumping rule will be determined by the game officials.

#### **Rule Changes From 2012**

**UPDATED:** Addition for coaches ability to be on the field for offense and defense for the 1st & 2nd grade division only. Please see Page 6, section IX. Coaches, for details

**UPDATED:** Various Penalties and Yardages

**UPDATED:** Overtime - In overtime, interceptions are **NOT** returnable. The play is automatically dead and the defense takes possession of the ball

Good  
Luck!