

Greenwich Premier Flag Football — Rules

June 2026

Uniforms & Equipment

- **Footwear:** molded plastic cleats or turf shoes suited to the field surface are our recommendation. Running shoes are permitted but discouraged. Metal spikes are strictly prohibited in all circumstances.
- **Jerseys:** every jersey must stay tucked into the shorts or pants for the entire game. If an untucked jersey interferes with an opponent's attempt to pull a flag, the referee may rule the play dead at that point.
- **Flags:** the two flags sit on the hips, one on each side, and players are responsible for resetting them between downs. A belt that has rotated around the waist, or a strap left dangling, is a uniform violation, and the referee may declare the play — run or reception — over because of it.
- **Layering:** players may wear extra clothing beneath the uniform for comfort, provided nothing covers or restricts an opponent's clean access to the flags. Clothing that obstructs a flag is likewise a uniform violation in the referee's judgment. (The enforcement ladder for uniform violations appears under Penalties & Conduct.)

Protective Gear

- A mouthguard is strongly encouraged for every player.
- Protective eyewear and soft-shell headgear are optional and may be added at a parent's discretion.

Game Clock & Timing

- A regulation game runs 40 minutes, played as two 20-minute halves with a 5-minute break at halftime.
- **Play clock:** once a drive is underway, the offense has 25 seconds to put the ball in play. The first violation draws a team warning; each one after that is a delay-of-game penalty (see Penalties & Conduct).
- **Timeouts:** each team holds two 60-second timeouts per half, which the coach may call at any moment.
- Officials may halt the clock whenever they judge it necessary — for an injury, an object on the field, or any similar circumstance.
- **Two-minute rule:** during the last two minutes of the second half, the clock stops on incomplete passes, dropped balls, and ball carriers who step out of bounds. After any completed play that ends in bounds, the clock keeps moving.

Pregame & Starting Play

- Five minutes before the scheduled start, the referee meets the coaches and team captains at midfield. Teams may bring as many players as they wish to this meeting, so long as everyone remains respectful toward the referee and the opposing team. The referee reviews the key rules with both sides and then conducts the coin toss.

- **Coin toss:** the winner has one choice to make — take offense or defense and let the loser pick the end of the field, or claim an end of the field and cede the offense/defense decision to the loser.
- Teams trade ends at halftime, and the team that opened the game on defense receives the ball to begin the second half.
- **Roster minimum:** a team needs at least six players present at the scheduled start time for an official game; arriving with fewer than six is an automatic forfeit. The teams may still agree to an unofficial, recreational game with as few as five per side — below five, the game is cancelled.

Scoring

- **Touchdown** — 6 points.
- **Conversion (after a touchdown):**
 - 1 point, attempted from the 5-yard line — passing plays only.
 - 2 points, attempted from the 10-yard line — run or pass.
- **No safeties:** when the quarterback, a runner, or a receiver has a flag pulled inside their own end zone, the ball simply comes out to the goal line — no points are awarded and possession does not change.
- **Mercy rule:** once a team trails by 18 points or more, it starts every possession at the 50-yard line with four plays to score, free to run or pass. The leading team must call running plays only, until the margin falls back under 18.

Possessions & Downs

- Every drive starts at the offense's own goal line, with four downs to advance the ball past midfield. Crossing midfield earns a first down and a fresh set of four downs to reach the end zone.
- If the offense fails to cross midfield — or crosses but never scores — possession turns over, and the opponent opens its drive from its own goal line.
- An interception is the single exception to starting at the goal line. An interception occurs when a defender catches any forward pass, or any lateral thrown behind the line of scrimmage. (A ball that comes loose any other way is dead where it lands — see Determining the End of a Play.)
- A defender may return an interception for yardage or a touchdown on any play except a conversion attempt — an intercepted extra point is immediately dead and cannot be brought back.
- **Spotting:** the ball is marked where the carrier's feet are at the moment the flag is pulled, not where the ball is. Referees do not consider whether the ball "breaks the plane" at the goal line or at midfield, which removes the reward for diving and other risky plays. The determination of an unsafe effort is at the discretion of the ref.
- A legal catch requires at least one foot down in bounds. If the receiver's other foot lands out of bounds, the completion stands, but the play ends right there — the receiver is down at the spot of the catch with no chance to advance.
- **Tempo:** except on the opening play of a drive, the ball becomes live as soon as the referee spots it and the offense is set — the offense is not required to wait for the defense.

- After a change of possession, however, the new offense must give the defense a reasonable opportunity to line up.

Running & Receiving

- The quarterback is the first player to touch the ball after the snap. The quarterback may never carry the ball across the line of scrimmage — passing and handing off are the only options. Any player who takes the ball after that may run, pass, pitch, or cross the line without restriction.
- **Stripping is illegal:** no player may rip the ball away or pull it out of a carrier's hands.
- Handoffs, pitches, screens, and laterals are all legal behind the line of scrimmage and count as running plays, with no cap on how many laterals a team strings together. **Past the line of scrimmage, no handoff or lateral of any kind is permitted.**
- Ball carriers may spin away from defenders, but their feet must stay on the ground — leaving your feet to escape a flag pull (diving or hurdling) is never allowed on offense.
- Every player on the field is an eligible receiver — including the quarterback, so long as the ball was handed off behind the line before being thrown back.
- One player at a time may go in motion before the snap, and the motion player may travel in any direction, including forward toward the line of scrimmage.
- **Two flags in place:** a receiver must have both flags properly attached when making a catch; otherwise the pass is ruled down at the spot of the catch. The same standard applies to the defense — an interception without two attached flags is ruled down at the spot of the catch.
- **No-Run Zones** sit 10 yards in front of each end zone and 5 yards on either side of midfield. Inside a No-Run Zone the offense must attempt a forward pass beyond the line of scrimmage — running plays are prohibited. A backward lateral followed by a forward pass does not satisfy the rule.

Passing

- Shovel passes are legal.
- A play may include one forward pass only.
- Intentional grounding penalties do not exist; a throwaway is an ordinary incompleteness.

Determining the End of a Play

The officials will stop the play for any of the following:

- a defender pulls the ball carrier's flag — or grabs the excess middle belt strap left hanging down;
- the ball carrier touches the sideline or any spot beyond it;
- the ball carrier's knee or body touches the turf (a free hand briefly placed on the ground for balance does not end the play);
- the ball carrier's flag detaches on its own — the ball is then spotted at the point where the flag came loose.

No fumbles. The ball can never be lost on the ground: any loose, dropped, or dislodged ball — including one knocked free by the defense — is dead the instant it lands and is spotted at that point.

Defense

- **Designated rusher:** the defense must always keep at least one player stationed within 7 yards of the line of scrimmage who is eligible to rush the quarterback. That player may rush or hold position, but may not drop back into pass coverage.
- The referee counts five seconds aloud after the snap; until that count finishes, no defender may rush the quarterback.
- Once the count expires, the defense may send any number of rushers, and defenders who stay back may play right up at the line of scrimmage.
- The instant the quarterback hands off or releases the ball, both the five-second count and the 7-yard restriction end — every defender may cross the line and pursue the ball.
- **Blocking and tackling are never allowed, by either team.** Stationary screens are legal, but no player may run alongside the ball carrier to shield them from defenders.
- Provided the offense has properly set their uniform, defenders may not pull on the jersey or shorts of an offensive runner/receiver to impede forward movement; if the uniform grab results in reduced yardage or a second player to pull a flag, the referee may call a 5-yard penalty in their discretion.

Overtime

- **Regular season:** a single overtime period, no more. Each team takes possession at the 10-yard line with four plays to score, and an interception returned for a touchdown wins the game outright. If the score is still level after the period, the game is recorded as a tie. Each team receives one timeout for overtime.
- **Playoffs:** overtime periods repeat until a winner emerges. The first period begins at the 10-yard line with four plays to score; the second and every later period begin at the 5-yard line. An interception returned for a touchdown ends the game immediately.

Penalties & Conduct

- **Conduct:** any deliberate tackle, elbow, cheap shot, block, or other unsportsmanlike act stops the game immediately and may bring an ejection at the referee's discretion. Rough play that is incidental to the normal flow of the game may be penalized 5 yards (see the penalty tables below), not punished with an ejection — and the referee alone judges what counts as incidental.
- Trash talk aimed at opponents, spectators, or referees is prohibited. The first instance brings a warning; if it continues, the offending player or players are ejected.
- Only a team's coach may approach the referee, and only to request a rule clarification or interpretation.
- A game may never end on a defensive penalty — the offense is entitled to an untimed final play unless it declines the flag.

Administrative Penalties

- **Delay of game** (assessed after the single team warning described in Game Clock & Timing): the clock stops, the offense is set back 5 yards from the line of scrimmage, and the clock restarts on the next snap.
- **Uniform violations:** first offense — a warning; second offense — the team is charged a timeout; every offense after the second — a 5-yard penalty from the line of scrimmage.

Note: if the offense commits a penalty after the ball has crossed midfield, the yardage is walked off even when it carries the ball back behind midfield — and the offense keeps only its existing four downs to score, with no new first down for re-crossing midfield.

Defensive Penalties

Infraction	Enforcement
Unnecessary roughness (referee's judgment)	5 yards from the spot of the foul, plus an automatic first down
Offside	5 yards from the line of scrimmage; the down is replayed
Pass interference	5 yards from the line of scrimmage, plus an automatic first down
Illegal contact with a receiver — holding, jersey-grabbing, blocking, or pushing the receiver, in bounds or out	5 yards, marked from the spot of the foul
Early flag pull (flag pulled before the receiver controls the ball)	If the catch is made: 5 yards from the spot of the foul. If the pass falls incomplete: 5 yards from the line of scrimmage
Designated rusher retreats beyond 7 yards from the line of scrimmage	5 yards from the line of scrimmage; the down is replayed

Offensive Penalties

Infraction	Enforcement
False start	5 yards from the line of scrimmage; the down is replayed
Unnecessary roughness (referee's judgment)	5 yards from the spot of the foul, plus loss of down
Illegal forward pass (released past the line of scrimmage)	5 yards from the line of scrimmage, plus loss of down
Pass interference (illegal pick plays, pushing off a defender)	5 yards from the line of scrimmage, plus loss of down
Flag guarding	5 yards from the spot of the foul, plus loss of down