

Gardendale Youth Flag Football Rules

RULES	PAGE
I. Game.....	1
II. Terminology.....	2
III. Equipment.....	2
IV. Rainout Procedure.....	3
V. Player Participation Rule.....	3
VI. Pick Up Player Rule	3
VII. Field	3
VIII. Timing and Overtime.....	4
IX. Scoring	4
X. Coaches.....	4
XI. Live Ball/Dead Ball	5
XII. Running.....	6
XIII. Quarterback Runs.....	6
XIV. Passing	6
XV. Receiving.....	7
XVI. Rushing the Passer	7
XVII. Flag Pulling.....	8
XVIII. Formations	8
XIX. Flow of the Game.....	9
XX. Unsportsmanlike Conduct.....	9
XXI. Penalties	9
XXII. Lightning Policy	11

I. Game

- a. At the start of each game, captains from both teams shall meet at midfield for the coin toss to determine who shall start with the ball. The visiting team shall call the toss.
- b. The winner of the coin toss gets to choose one of the following options: offense, defense: or field direction. The loser of the coin toss chooses from the remaining of the above options. Teams may not choose to defer to the second half.
- c. At the beginning of a game, after half time, and after each score the offensive team will take possession of the ball at its 5-yard line.
- d. The offensive team will have four (4) downs to cross midfield. Once a team crosses midfield they will have four (4) downs to score. On fourth (4th) down the offense will either choose to “go for it” or punt. If an offense chooses to “go for it” and they reach the line to gain they will be awarded a first down, and if they score they will be awarded 6 points. If the offense does not reach the line to gain or score a touchdown on 4th down, the defensive team will take possession of the ball at the spot in which the player was declared down, or on an incomplete pass the defense will take possession of the ball at the line of scrimmage where the previous play started. If a team elects to punt, the ball will be placed on the opposing team’s 5-yard line where they will take possession.
- e. Teams will change sides after the first half and the team that started on offense will now start 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 (LOS)** - 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 7 yards (into the defensive side) from the Line of Scrimmage.
- **Offense** - the squad with possession of the ball.
- **Defense** - the squad opposing the offense to prevent them from advancing the ball.
- **Quarterback** - the offensive player that receives the snap from the center (may or may not be the player that is lined up behind the center).
- **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 him/her from passing by pulling his/her flags or blocking the pass (must start from at least 7 yards from the line of scrimmage).
- **Downs (1-2-3-4)** - the offensive squad has four attempts or "Down "to advance the ball. They must cross the Line to Gain to get another set of downs or to score.
- **Live Ball** - the period of time that the play is in action. Generally used in regard 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.
- **Whistle** - the sound made by an official using a whistle that signifies the end of the play or a stop in the action for timeout, halftime or the end of the game. Also, the whistle may be sounded to signify the start of a play.
- **Inadvertent whistle** - an official's whistle that is performed in error.
- **Charging** - the movement of the ball carrier directly at a defensive player who has established position on the field. This includes lowering the head, contacting the defender with a shoulder, chest or forearm.
- **Flag Guarding** - an act by the ball carrier to prevent a defender from pulling the ball carrier's flags by stiff arm, lowering elbow or head or by blocking access to the runner's flags with a hand or arm.
- **Shovel Pass** - a legal pass attempted behind the line of scrimmage by throwing the ball underhand or pushing it towards a receiver in a shot-put type manner.
- **Lateral** - a backwards or sideways toss of the ball by the ball carrier (one lateral allowed per play).
- **Handoff** - directly giving the ball from one offensive player to another offensive player in the backfield (Must be hand to hand). The offense has unlimited amount handoffs available.
- **Unsportsmanlike Conduct** - rude, confrontational, or offensive behavior or language.

III. Equipment

- a. The League provides each player with a flag belt and each team. Teams must use the flag belt provided by NFL Flag. **Players need to learn how to put their flags back on unassisted. Flag belts will be checked by the officials after each touchdown. If the official cannot easily pull the player's flag, the down will be re-played.**
- b. The League provides each team with an NFL Flag football. Teams must use the football provided by the Gardendale Flag Football league. **The League will provide NFL Flag footballs to the officials for use in all games.** 10-12 Age group uses an intermediate football and all other age groups use a junior size football.
- c. Players must wear shoes. Cleats are allowed, however cleats with exposed metal are not allowed and must be removed.

- d. Players may tape their forearms, hands and fingers. Players may wear gloves, elbow pads, and kneepads.
- e. Players must remove all watches, earrings and any other jewelry that the officials deem hazardous.
- f. Official NFL Flag jerseys must be worn during play. Home team wears dark jerseys and visitor team wears light jerseys (using the torso part of the jersey below the shoulders).
- g. Pants or shorts with belt loops or pockets are not allowed.
- h. Protective mouthpieces are highly recommended.
- i. Flag Obstruction – All jerseys that hang below the beltline **MUST** be tucked into the pants before play begins and players must keep them tucked in throughout the game. The flags must be on the player's hips pointed outward and free from obstruction. All excess on flag belts should be either tucked in or cut-off. Deliberately obstructed flags will be considered flag guarding.
- j. Player shorts cannot be the same color as the flag the player is wearing. All flags will either be yellow or green.

IV. Rainout Procedure

- a. Please check the Gardendale Flag Football Facebook or Twitter account to see if fields are available for practice or games. When in doubt, we will try to update the social media sites concerning rainouts by 4:00 p.m. on that day.

V. Player Participation Rule

- a. All players are required to play at least 50% of the game.

VI. Player Pickup Rule

- a. Teams that do not have enough players may pick up a player(s) off another Gardendale Youth NFL Flag Football team.
- b. Teams may pick up a player if they only have a maximum of 6 players including the player picked up.
- c. Teams may pick up a player evaluated in the 5th round or later no matter what round the absent player was evaluated in.
- d. For players that are absent that were evaluated in the 1st – 3rd rounds, teams may pick up a player one round lower. For example, if a team's player was evaluated in the 2nd round and is absent, the team needing a player may pick up a player evaluated in the 3rd round or later.

VII. Field

- a. The field size is **30 yards by 70 yards** with two 10-yard end zones and a midfield line-to-gain. No-Running Zones precede each line-to-gain by 5 yards.
- b. 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 end zone), teams may not run the ball in any fashion. All plays, including those that begin with handoff, must be pass plays.
- c. Stepping on the boundary line is considered out of bounds.
- d. Each offensive squad 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 touchdown).

VIII. Timing and Overtime

- a. Games will be 45 minutes in length and will consist of two 22:30 minute halves with a 1 minute half-time. The clock is continuous and only stops for team or official timeouts.
- b. In the second-half the clock will stop with 1:00 remaining in the game. From this point on, the clock will stop on first-downs, out of bounds, and penalties.
- c. Each team has two thirty second (:30) timeouts per half of play. These do not carry over and operate in a use or lose fashion.
- d. Games that are tied at the end of regulation will continue per the overtime rules listed below:
 - In overtime, each team will have one down to score.
 - Teams will have the option to go for 1 point from the 5-yard line or to go for 2 points from the 12-yard line. Attempts from the 5-yard line will be pass only and attempts from the 12-yard line will be “either or”.
 - Overtime will start with a coin-flip. The team that wins the coin-flip will choose whether they want to play offense or defense first.
 - If the game is tied at the end of the first overtime period, the game will enter a second overtime period. The team that was on offense first in the first overtime period will start the second overtime period on defense.
 - For regular season games – games that are still tied at the end of the second overtime period will end in a tie.
 - For tournament games – games that are still tied at the end of the second overtime period will continue with the same format as the first two overtime periods until a winner can be determined.

IX. Scoring

- a. Touchdowns are 6 points.
- b. After a team scores a touchdown, they will try for an extra point. Teams will have the option to go for 1 or go for 2. Extra point attempts from the 5-yard line will be pass only. Extra point attempts from the 12-yard line will be “either or”.
 - Successful extra point attempts from the 5-yard line will count for 1 point.
 - Successful extra point attempts from the 12-yard line will count for 2 points.
- c. Safeties are 2 points for the defensive team.

X. Coaches

- a. A coach needs to realize that they are a teacher, not a drill sergeant. They should help children learn and work to improve their skills. Personal gains are never a consideration. The job does not depend on winning. The best interest of the child transforms into the best interests of the game.
- b. The safety and welfare of the children never can be compromised. A coach will consider these factors above all others.
- c. Be patient. Don't push children beyond limits in regard to practice. Children have many daily pressures - the football experience should not be one of them. Playing football should be fun.
- d. Care more about the players as people than as athletes. The youth football program is a means to

- an end, not an end in itself
- e. A coach should encourage players to dream and set lofty goals. It is important to remain positive and refrain from discouraging remarks. Negative comments are remembered far more often than positive affirmations.
 - f. Remember that the rules of the game are designed to protect the participants, as well as to set a standard for competition. Never circumvent or take advantage of the rules by teaching deliberate misconduct. A coach who puts his or her opponents' team at risk should not be involved with children.
 - g. Be the first person to demonstrate good sportsmanship. Take a low profile during the game and allow the kids to be the center of attention.
 - h. Parents and players place a lot of trust and confidence in the coach. The coach has an important role in molding the athletic experience of the child.
 - i. A coach can measure success by the respect he gets from his or her players, regardless of victories or defeats. Children who mature socially and physically while participating in sports are the best indication of good coaching.
 - j. Only Head Coaches can approach the officials to question a play/call and it must be done in a respectful manner. Head or Assistant Coaches yelling/arguing with the officials will not be tolerated. If this occurs in a game, the 1st occurrence is an Unsportsmanlike Condukt penalty and the 2nd occurrence is ejection from the game.

XI. Live Ball/Dead Ball

- a. The ball is live at the snap of the ball and remains live until the official whistles the ball dead.
- b. The official will indicate the neutral zone and line of scrimmage. The neutral zone is one yard wide and separates the offense from the defense. It is an automatic dead ball foul if any player on defense or offense enters the neutral zone. The official may give both teams a "courtesy" neutral zone notification to allow their players to move back beyond the line.
- c. A player who gains possession in the air is considered in bounds if one foot comes down in the field of play.
- d. 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.
- e. Substitutions may be made on any dead ball.
- f. Any official can whistle the play dead.
- g. Play is ruled "dead" when:
 - The ball hits the ground.
 - The ball carrier's flag is pulled.
 - The ball carrier steps out of bounds.
 - A touchdown, PAT or safety is scored.
 - The ball carrier's knee (touches the ground or is down).
 - The ball carrier's flag falls out and defensive player touches the ball carrier with one hand from knee to shoulder.
 - The 7-second pass clock expires.
 - An inadvertent whistle is performed (at the spot where the ball was whistled dead).
- h. In the case of an inadvertent whistle, the offense has two options:

- Take the ball where the whistle blew,
 - Replay the down from the original line of scrimmage.
- i. A team can 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. The lead official will make the final ruling. If the ruling is corrected the team will be charged a time out. *Note on Fumbles: The ball is spotted where the ball hits the ground. Exception - a team cannot gain an advantage by having a ball that is fumbled forward. In this case the ball will be spotted where the ball was fumbled.*

XII. Running

- a. The ball is spotted where the ball is when the flag is pulled.
- b. Offense may use unlimited handoffs behind the line of scrimmage. There are no handoffs or laterals (backward pitch) allowed past the line of scrimmage. Once the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage, no forward passes may be thrown.
- c. One lateral or pitch is allowed behind the line of scrimmage.
- d. "No-Run Zones," located 5 yards before each end zone and 5 yards on either side of 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. There must be one forward pass in the "No-Run Zone". (Reminder: Each offensive squad approaches only TWO "No-Run Zones" in each drive - one 5 yards from midfield to gain the first down. one 5 yards from the goal line to score a TD).
- e. The player who takes a handoff can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage.
- f. Once the ball leaves the quarterbacks hands all defensive players are eligible to rush.
- g. Ball carriers may dive to advance the ball, but CANNOT contact a defensive player.
- h. Ball carriers may spin to avoid their flag being pulled.
- i. Ball carriers may NOT jump over or hurdle a defensive player.
- j. No blocking or screening is allowed at any time.
- k. Offensive players that do not have the ball must stop their motion once the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage. Offensive players cannot run with the ball carrier. Defensive players must go around stationary offensive players. Offensive players that are moving beyond the line of scrimmage without the ball, and have no bearing on the play, will not be penalized.

XIII. Quarterback Runs

- a. The quarterback can directly run the ball in both the first half and in the second half. **However, quarterbacks can only run the ball once per four downs.**
- b. The player that receives the snap is considered the quarterback (the player lined up behind the center may or may not receive the snap). The quarterback may receive a forward pass and run past the line of scrimmage. The quarterback may receive a lateral pass and run past the line of scrimmage. The quarterback may receive a handoff and run past the line of scrimmage. A forward pass behind the line of scrimmage is a legal play.

XIV. Passing

- a. All passes must be from behind the line of scrimmage and thrown forward, but may be received

behind the line of scrimmage. Forward passes caught behind the line of scrimmage will NOT satisfy requirements for Pass Only downs.

- b. Shovel passes are allowed. A forward pass that does not cross the line of scrimmage is still a legal play for non-Pass Only downs.
- c. The quarterback has a seven-second "pass clock." If a pass is not thrown within the seven seconds, play is dead, the down is consumed and the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage. Once the ball is handed off, the 7-second rule no longer is in effect. The penalty of the expiration of the 7-second pass clock is an incomplete pass. If the QB is standing in the end zone at the end of the 7-second clock, the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage.
- d. There can be only one forward pass during a play. A hand-off is not considered a pass.

XV. Receiving

- a. All players are eligible to receive passes (including the quarterback if the ball has been handed off behind the line of scrimmage).
- b. Only one player is allowed in motion at a time. All motion must be parallel to the line of scrimmage and no motion is permitted towards the line of scrimmage. A player in motion that is returning to the line of scrimmage must be set for one second before the ball is snapped.
- c. A player must have at least one foot inbounds when making a reception.
- d. In the case of simultaneous possession by both an offensive and defensive player, possession is awarded to the offense.
- e. Interceptions change the possession of the ball at the point of interception. The player that intercepted the ball may return the interception until his or her flag is pulled.
- f. Interceptions are returnable on all plays including point after conversion attempts.

XVI. Rushing the Passer

- a. All players who rush the passer must be a minimum of seven 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.
- b. Once the ball is handed off or passed, the seven-yard rule no longer is in effect and all defenders may go behind the line of scrimmage.
- c. A special marker, or the referee, will designate a Rush Line seven yards from the line of scrimmage. Defensive players should verify they are in the correct position with the official on every play.
 - A legal rush is:
 - Any rush from a point 7 yards from the defensive line of scrimmage.
 - A rush from anywhere on the field AFTER the ball has been handed off or passed by the quarterback.
 - If a rusher leaves the rush line early, they may return to the rush line, reset and then legally rush the quarterback.
 - If a rusher leaves the rush line early and the ball is handed off before they cross the line of scrimmage, they may legally rush the quarterback.
 - A penalty may be called if:
 - The rusher leaves the rush line before the snap and crosses the line of scrimmage before a handoff or pass - Illegal Rush

- Any defensive player crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped - Offsides
- Any defensive player, not lined up at the rush line crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is passed or handed off - Illegal Rush
- Special circumstances:
 - Teams are not required to rush the quarterback, seven second clock in effect.
 - Teams are not required to identify their rusher before the play.
 - If rusher leaves the 7-yard rush line before the snap, he/she may immediately drop back to act as a defender with no Illegal Rush penalty enforced.
- d. Players rushing the Quarterback may attempt to block a pass. However, NO contact can be made with the quarterback in any way.
- e. Offense cannot impede the rusher in any way. The rusher has a CLEAR PATH to the QB and any interference that would impede his/her path to the QB will be considered screening. The defense may attempt to block a pass provided they do not strike the passer.
- f. Blocking the pass and then striking the passer will result in a 10-yard penalty from LOS and 1st down.
- g. A Sack occurs if the QB's flags are pulled behind the line of scrimmage. The ball is placed "where the ball is" when the flag was pulled.
- h. A Safety (2 points) is awarded if the sack takes place in the offensive team's end zone.

XVII. Flag Pulling

- a. A legal flag pull takes place when the ball carrier is in full possession of the ball.
- b. Defenders can dive to pull flags, but cannot tackle, hold or run through ball carrier when pulling flags.
- c. It is illegal to attempt to strip or pull the ball or pull from the ball carrier's possession at any time.
- d. If a player's flag inadvertently falls off during the play, the ball carrier will be down when the defense touches the ball carrier anywhere with one hand.
- e. A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off of a player who is not in possession of the ball. Penalty is delay of game.
- f. Flag guarding is an attempt by the ball carrier to obstruct the defender's access to the flags by stiff arming dropping of head, hand, arm or shoulder, or intentionally covering flags with the football or jersey.
- g. We are using a two-flag system where the belt does not come OFF when the flag is pulled. It is a good idea for a player to hold the flag up immediately after the flag pull so the official can see it. Officials will have a hard time seeing a flag pull if they are on the opposite site of the flag pull.

XVIII. Formations

- a. An offensive team must have a minimum of three players on the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped. The quarterback must be off the line of scrimmage.
- b. Only one player is allowed in motion at a time. All motion must be parallel to the line of scrimmage and no motion is permitted towards the line of scrimmage. A player in motion that is returning to the line of scrimmage must be set for one second before the ball is snapped.
- c. Movement by a player who is set or a player who runs toward the line of scrimmage while in motion is considered a false start.

- d. The center must snap the ball with a rapid and continuous motion between or to the side of his/her legs to a player in the backfield, and the ball must completely leave his/her hands. Either direct snaps or shotgun snaps are allowed.

XIX. Flow of the Game

- a. To help control the flow of the game, one official will keep a 30 second play clock from when the ball is spotted until snapped. Defenses should be ready to play quickly and offenses will hold up if the official indicates to wait.

XX. Unsportsmanlike Conduct

- a. If the field monitor or referee witnesses any acts of intentional tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, blocking, or any 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.**
- b. 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, but has the right to immediately eject a player, coach, or spectator if the language is profane or threatening. If it continues, the player(s), coach(s), or spectator(s) will be ejected from the field.
- c. Players may not physically or verbally abuse any opponent or official.
- d. Ball carriers **MUST** make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position.
- e. Defenders are not allowed to run through the ball carrier or stationary offensive players when pulling flags.
- f. Fans must also adhere to good sportsmanship:
 - a. Yell to cheer on your players, not to harass officials or the other team
 - b. Keep comments clean and profanity free.
 - c. Compliment ALL players, not just one child or team.
- g. Fans are required to keep fields safe and kid friendly.
 - a. Keep younger kids and equipment such as coolers, chairs and tents away from the sidelines. B. Give at least a 5-yard barrier to the sidelines_
- h. Any plays developed that an official might consider unsportsmanlike may be penalized by a replay of the down, delay of game penalty, or unsportsmanlike conduct penalty.
- i. Players, coaches, and/or spectators may not physically abuse or verbally threaten an official. This is a Class C Felony and charges will be filed by the official and the Gardendale Flag Football League if such behavior occurs.

XXI. Penalties

- a. General
 - The officials will call all penalties.
 - Officials determine incidental contact that may result from normal run of play.
 - All penalties will be assessed from the line of scrimmage, except spot fouls as noted below.
 - Only the Head Coach may ask the officials questions about rule clarification and interpretations.

- Games cannot end on a defensive penalty, unless the offense declines it.
- Penalties are assessed Live Ball then Dead Ball. Live Ball penalties must be assessed before play is considered completed.
- Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal when the penalty yardage is more than half the distance to the goal.
- Spot fouls that occur behind the line of scrimmage are marked off from the line of scrimmage.
- Any play run from the "No Run Zone" that receives an offensive penalty will result in the next offensive play of that play series being a "No Run Zone play" (offense should not gain an advantage on a penalty).
- Any offensive or defensive penalty may be accepted or declined (all pre-snap penalties will be considered dead plays).
- Any successive penalty situation in which the officials consider a delay of game tactic being used, may result in a double penalty and may include an automatic first down situation or offensive equivalent (THIS RULE IS HOW VTO HANDLE SUCCESSIVE PENALTIES IN WHICH A STALEMATE OR DELAY OF GAME IS INVOLVED).

Defensive Penalties	Yardage
Offside	5 yards from LOS
Illegal Rushing (rush from inside the marker, start before snap, etc.)	5 yards from LOS
Illegal Flag Pull (Before ball is caught)	5 yards from LOS & automatic first down
Roughing the Passer	5 yards from LOS & automatic first down
Illegal Contact (Holding, Blocking, etc.)	Spot Foul & automatic first down
Stripping	Spot Foul & automatic first down
Defensive Pass Interference	Spot Foul & automatic first down
Unnecessary Roughness	10 yards from spot & automatic first down
Unsportsman Like Conduct	10 yards from spot & automatic first down
Taunting	10 yards from spot & automatic first down

Offensive Penalties	Yardage
Offside/False Start	5 yards from LOS
Illegal Motion	5 yards from LOS
Delay of Game	5 yards from LOS
Illegal Pass (Throwing past LOS, Two forward passes, etc.)	5 yards from LOS & loss of down
Illegal Run (illegal QB run, run on pass-only down, etc.)	5 yards from LOS & loss of down
Offensive Pass Interference (Pick Play, Push Off, etc.)	5 yards from LOS & loss of down
Flag Guarding	5 yards from spot of occurrence

Offensive Penalties	Yardage
Illegal Contact (Holding, blocking, charging, etc.)	5 yards from spot of occurrence
Downfield Blocking (Running w/ ball carrier, screening, etc.)	5 yards from spot of occurrence
Unnecessary Roughness	10 yards from spot & loss of down
Un-Sportsman Like Conduct	10 yards from spot & loss of down
Taunting	10 yards from spot & loss of down

XXII. Gardendale Flag Football Lightning Policy

Given that the priority must always be the safety and well-being of our children, and there will invariably be differences in judgment regarding the safety of playing a game under impending inclement weather, the Gardendale Parks and Recreation Department has issued these guidelines in the case of inclement weather during any game or event at any municipal park.

If lightning or thunder is observed by parents, coaches, or umpires, all players must be immediately removed from the field and re-located to a safe area with their parents or guardians, for 15 minutes. With each observed lightning flash or thunderclap, a new 15-minute delay will begin. After 15 minutes without lightning, or thunder, the game may begin or resume with the approval of an umpire or a member of the youth association. If an umpire or a member of the youth association believes that it is unsafe to continue play, the game should be suspended and rescheduled.

Different situations prevail for everyone in threatening weather situations. Therefore, coaches, parents, and umpires must exercise their own best judgment while considering a function or activity at the park. Each association shall always take the action that is deemed to be in the best interest of all families. In the end, the decision to attend or participate in an activity during inclement weather must be an individual one based on each person's circumstances. At any time, a parent may remove their child from the game due to weather-related safety concerns without penalty to the parent or the child. There will not be any penalty assessed to the affected team and the coach may not discipline the child because of this instance.