

2026 PIAA FLAG FOOTBALL ADMINISTRATORS GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION

Flag Football Administrators,

Thank you for taking a big step in the growth of girls' high school flag football in Pennsylvania. This is a tremendous expansion of opportunities for players, coaches and officials, and there are many opportunities for learning and development throughout this first non-state championship season.

In addition to this being new to Pennsylvania at the high school level, this rules book is also brand new. This is the first year that the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) has published a rule book. As such, there is no official NFHS case book or officials manual. It's notable that this rules book is built on the backbones of both the NFHS Football and the NIRSA Flag and Touch Football Rules Books.

With all of that in mind, this PIAA Administrators Guide is designed to provide supplemental information designed to help all stakeholders better understand the game and be successful. This document, in conjunction with PIAA Flag Football Officials Manual, helps to provide a deeper understanding of the rules and philosophies that govern the game.

This guide will also help guide purchasing decisions and game day operations among those who sponsor flag football.

Throughout this season, I suspect you will have a lot of questions. That's great! It means you're committed to the success of girls' flag football in this state. If you have those questions, don't hesitate to email me, and I will respond as quickly as I can.

If you have video clips and want an explanation, send them my way.

We're all in this together, and we all want to continue to grow the game.

Let's have a great season!

Respectfully,



Nick Brigati
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PIAA ADOPTIONS

Please refer to Table 1-7 on page 20 of the 2025-26 NFHS Flag Football Rules Book

1. Flag Football Field Diagram #1 shows the official field dimensions (Flag Football Field Diagram #1).
2. 3 officials (Referee, Line Judge and Back Judge) will be used for games (1-1-4 NOTE).
3. Game officials assume authority 30 minutes prior to the contest (1-1-7).
4. No alterations to the team boxes (1-2-3e NOTE 3).
5. Goals are not authorized for use (1-2-5).
6. There will be a ball mandated for postseason play beginning in 2027 (1-3-2 NOTE).
7. Kicking tees are not authorized for use (1-3-4).
8. Play clocks and microphones for the referee are authorized to aid in game administration (1-3-7).
9. Schools are permitted to wear commemorative/memorial patches (1-4-1a(2) NOTE, 1-5-1(3) NOTE).
10. The pop socket-style flag belt with 3 flags (one on each hip and one on the tailbone) is required (1-5-1f NOTE). *For 2026 only, a pop socket style belt with only 2 flags (one on each hip) is permitted.*
11. The use of a drum for rhythmic cadence for deaf or partially deaf teams is approved (1-6-1 NOTE).
12. Hash marks will not be used. The ball will always be snapped from the center of the field (2-35-3 NOTE).
13. An overtime procedure to resolve games tied following the 4th period was approved. Please refer to page 12 in this document (3-1-1 NOTE).
14. When the point differential reaches 35, the game clock will continuously run. Please refer to page 11 of this document (3-1-2).
15. An interrupted game will be resumed from the point of interruption if both teams agree. Otherwise, it will be declared a no contest (3-1-4).
16. The halftime intermission is 10 minutes (3-1-6).
17. The coin toss will be held 3 minutes prior to the start of the game (3-2-1).
18. TV/radio time-outs are not permitted (3-5-7).
19. Kicking field goals and tries are not permitted (2-19-5, 8-3-3 NOTE, 8-4-1).

PIAA 2026 FLAG FOOTBALL CALENDAR

First Day of Practice – Monday, March 2

Minimum Length of Preseason Practice – 10 days within 2 weeks

First Inter-School Practice or Scrimmage Day – Saturday, March 7

Maximum Number of Regular Season Inter-School Practices or Scrimmages – 2

First Regular Season Contest Day – Friday, March 13

Maximum Length of Regular Season – 10 weeks

Maximum Number of Regular Season Contests – 18

Last Regular Season Contest Day – Monday, May 25

PIAA District/Region Deadline – Monday, May 25

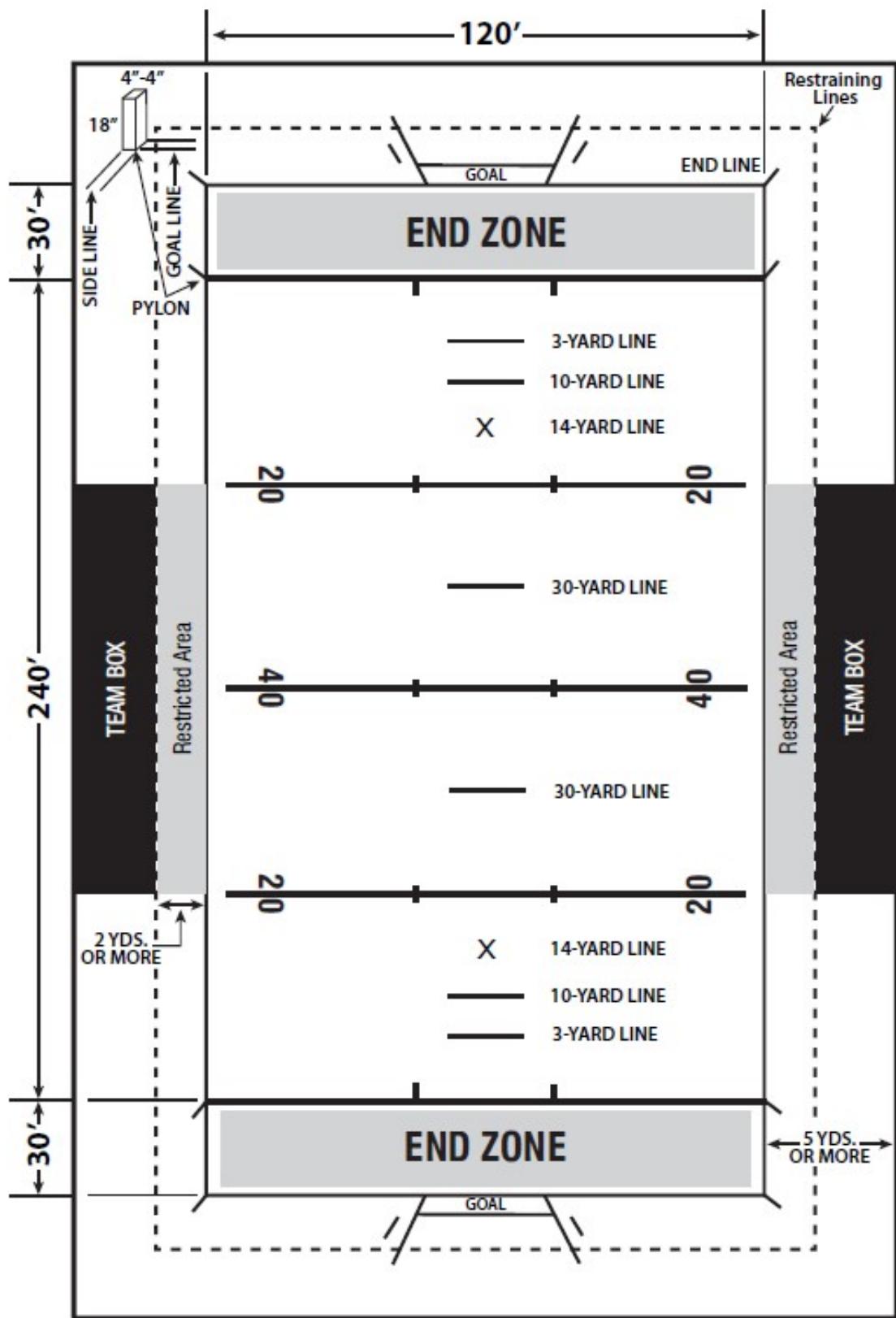
PIAA Championships Deadline – Monday May 25* (*No state championship in 2026*)

RULES BOOK EDITS

Please edit the following items in the 2025-26 NFHS Flag Football Rules Book:

- Flag Football Field Diagrams #2 and #3:
 - Strikethrough these diagrams.
- Rule 1, Section 2, Article 5 (pages 10-11):
 - Strikethrough this article.
- Rule 1, Section 3, Article 4 (page 13):
 - Strikethrough this article.
- Rule 2, Section 14, Article 2, Sub article h, Item 1 (page 24):
 - Strikethrough this item.
- Rule 2, Section 19, Article 3 (page 25):
 - Edit the second sentence to read, “A punt must be used.”
- Rule 2, Section 27, Section 6 (page 27):
 - Strikethrough this article.
- Rule 2, Section 27, Section 7 (page 27):
 - Delete “or place kicks” from the first sentence.
- Rule 4, Section 2, Article 2, Sub article a (page 38):
 - Delete EXCEPTIONS 1 & 2 and the NOTE.
- Rule 4, Section 2, Article 2, Sub article f (page 38):
 - Edit the first sentence to read, “When any legal scrimmage kick breaks the plane of R’s goal line.”
Delete items 1 & 2 and the EXCEPTION.
- Rule 4, Section 2, Article 2, Sub article j (page 39):
 - Delete “or as soon as it is apparent that a kick has failed to score.”
- Rule 5, Section 2, Article 5 (page 41):
 - Delete “or a field goal (if 2-19-5 applies),” from the first sentence.
- Rule 6, Section 1, Article 1 (page 42):
 - Delete “or place kick (if 2-19-5 applies), from the first sentence.
- Rule 6, Section 2, Article 2 (page 43):
 - Edit the first sentence to read, “It is a touchback if any scrimmage kick breaks the plane of R’s goal line, unless R chooses a spot of first touching by K.” Delete sub articles 1 & 2.
- Table 8-1 (page 47):
 - Delete “Field Goal (if approved by State Association Adoption) 3 points: and “c. Field Goal – 3 yd (if approved by State Association Adoption) 1 point” from the table.
- Rule 8, Section 3, Article 2, Sub Article b (page 49):
 - Strikethrough this sub article.
- Rule 8, Section 3, Article 3, (page 49):
 - Delete “, field goal (from B’s 3-yard line)” from the second sentence, and strikethrough the NOTE.
- Rule 8, Section 3, Article 6 (page 49):
 - Delete “/K” and “/R” from sub articles a and b.
- Rule 8, Section 4 (page 49):
 - Strikethrough this article.
- Rule 8, Section 5, Article 3, Sub article a, Item 1 (page 50):
 - Edit this item to read, “Breaks the plane of R’s goal line unless R chooses a spot of first touching by K.”
- Rule 9, Section 9, Article 4 (page 55):
 - Delete “in violation of Rule 1-3-4” from this article.

NFHS FLAG FOOTBALL FIELD DIAGRAM



FLAG FOOTBALL FIELD MARKING NOTES

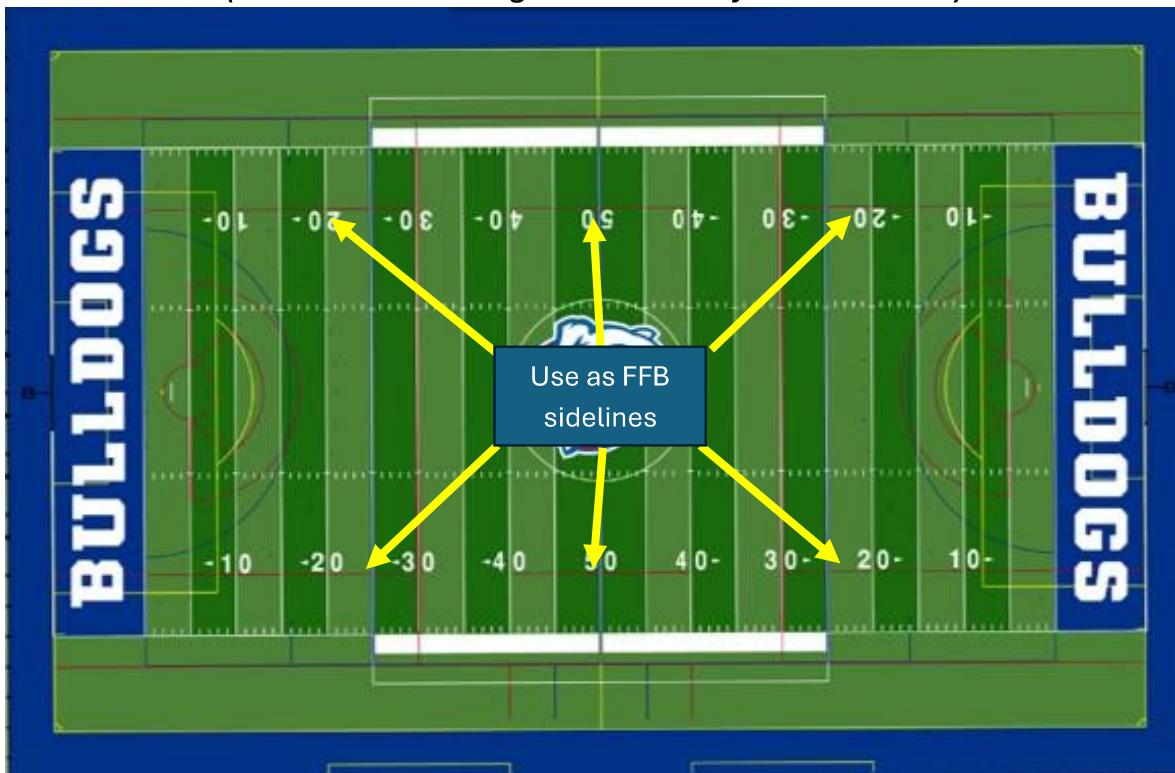
The NFHS Flag Football Field Diagram #1 (on page 6) should be used in lining the flag football field for a grass field. Please bear the following items in mind:

- Hash marks were not approved by the PIAA, so there are no additional markings needed on the goal lines, 20-yard lines and 40-yard line.
- Goals (football goalposts and uprights) were not approved by the PIAA, so they are not needed.

When marking a turf field for flag football, the following items will help streamline the process:

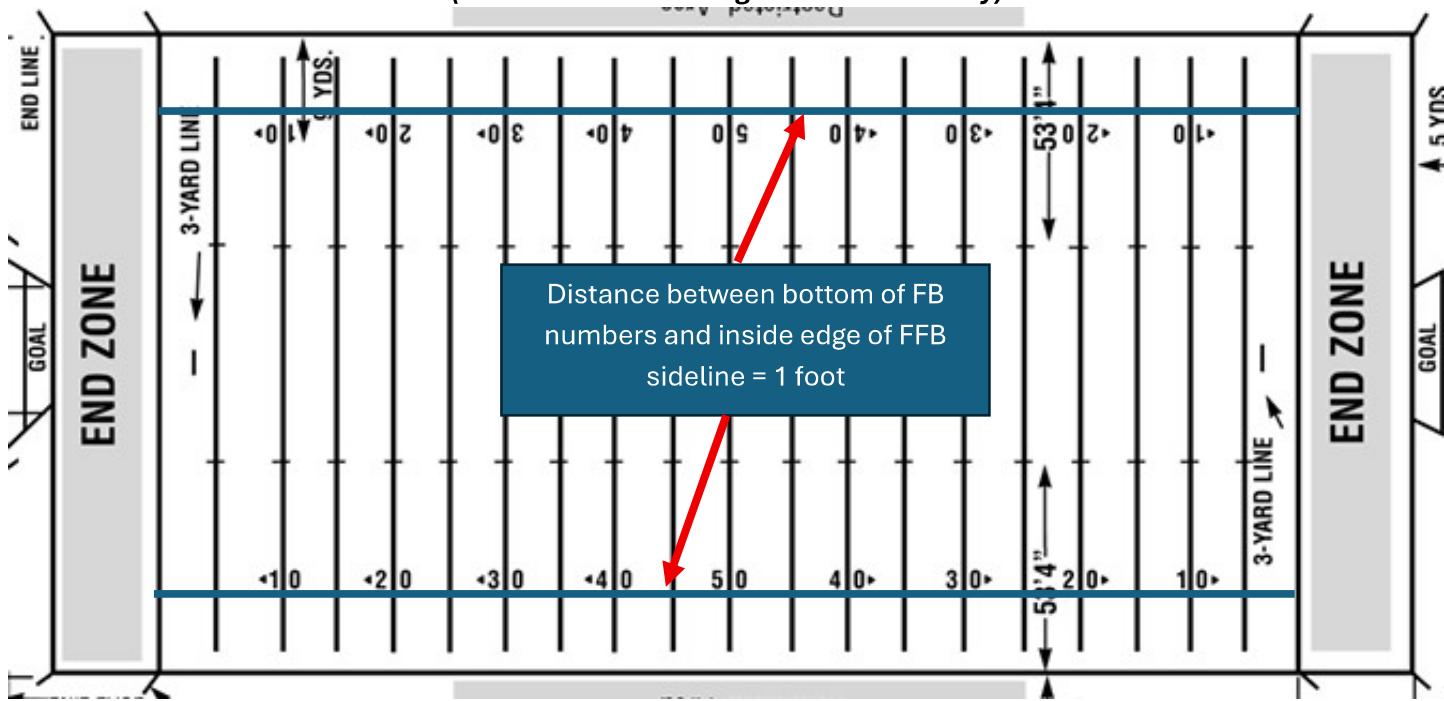
- If the field has lines for both football and boys lacrosse (Diagram A below):
 - The boys lacrosse lines for the goal area and the wing area lines can be used as flag football sidelines (as they are 40 yards apart)
 - A spray chalk that is turf safe is recommended to complete the sidelines by connecting these two lines (approximately 40 total yards of line length)
 - Flat or disc-style cones may also be used in place of marked sidelines and end lines.
 - When this is done, no additional marks are required (unless the football field has no yard line extensions at the football hash marks. In this case, it is recommended that the 3-, 10- and 14-yard lines be marked with chalk in the center of the field).
 - The football goal lines will be the flag football endlines.
 - The football 10-yard lines will be the flag football goal lines.
 - The football 30-yard lines will be the flag football 20-yard lines.
 - The football 50-yard line will be the flag football 40-yard line.

Diagram A
(Turf field with existing football and boys lacrosse lines)



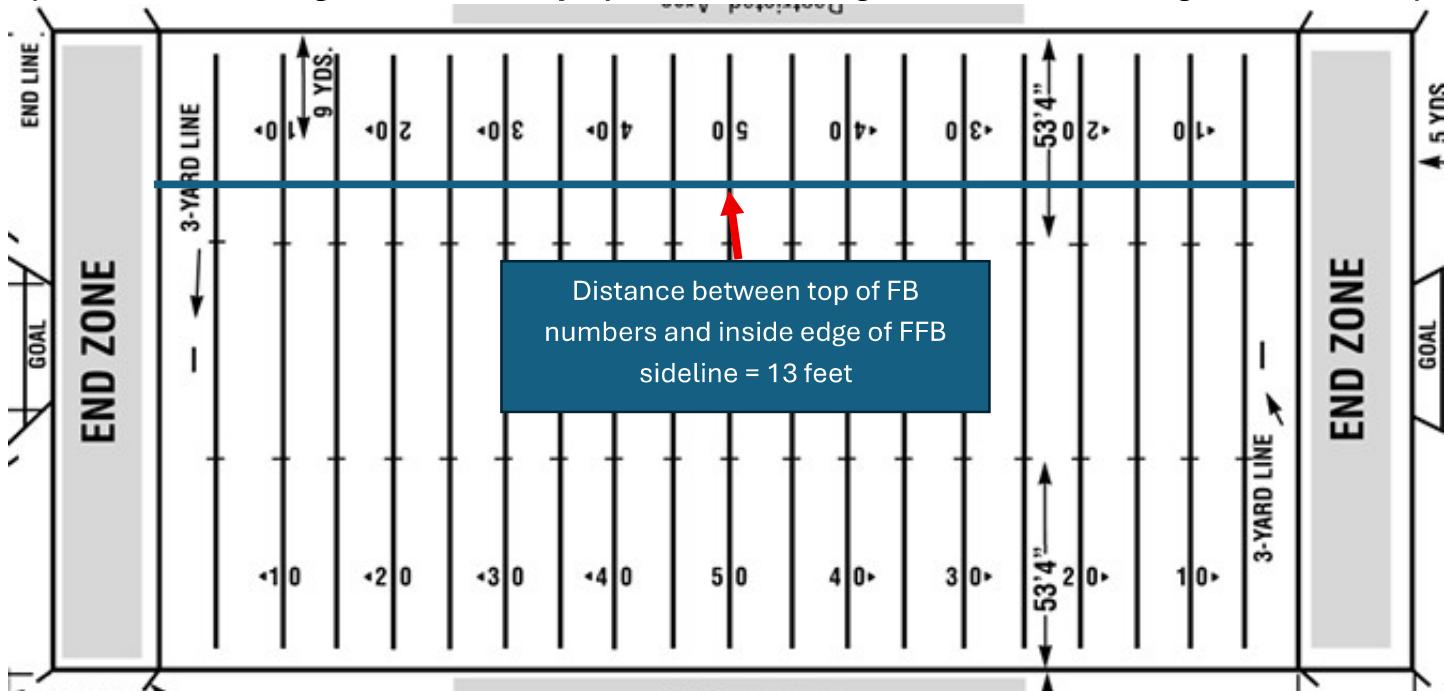
- If a turf field only has football markings, sidelines can be marked by measuring 1 foot outside the bottom of each yard-line number (Diagram B on next page).

Diagram B
(Turf field with existing football lines only)



- If you choose to use an existing football sideline as the flag football sideline, the other sideline should be measured 13 feet inside of the top of the yard-line numbers farthest from the permanent sideline in use (Diagram C below).

Diagram C
(Turf field with existing football lines only; option to use existing football side line as flag football sideline)



FLAG FOOTBALL FIELD EQUIPMENT NEEDS

Schools should be prepared to have the following items of equipment available for flag football games:

- 10 football-style pylons (orange, yellow or red in color)
 - 4 will be placed at the intersection of the goal lines and sidelines
 - 4 will be placed at the intersection of the sidelines and end lines
 - 2 will be placed 1 yard beyond the end line where it intersects with an imaginary line drawn down the center of the field.
- Football-style down marker.
 - The down marker will need an operator (this is the only on-field member of the "chain gang" for flag football).
 - The down marker operator will be working under the direction of the line judge.
 - The down marker should be positioned 2 yards off the sideline at the zone-to-gain. On tries, the down marker should be positioned 2 yards off the sideline at the goal line and display the value of the try (1 or 2).
 - If action comes at the down marker operator, the operator should not drop the down marker but rather move back away from the sideline while holding the down marker
- Ball spotter discs.
 - Used to mark the offensive and defensive team's scrimmage lines by the referee
 - Small, flat discs (as shown at right) or flat, disc-style cones may be used.
 - Officials may provide these, but they should be available if needed.



Please note that, if a school opts not to paint/chalk flag football sidelines/end lines on their turf, field, flat or disc-style cones (pictured) are required to mark the field boundaries. A set of at least 20 such cones should be available and should be placed (at minimum) as follows:

- 7 cones on each sideline placed every 10 yards (10-, 20-, 30- and 40-yard lines)
- 3 on each end line placed every 10 yards.

Optional field equipment includes:

- Football sideline markers (as used for football, but only G's, 20's and 40's are needed).
- Visible scoreboard with game clock.
- Visible play clock (these must be padded if the play clock is within 10 yards of any boundary).
- Microphone for the referee to make announcements.
- Goal post pads (these are not required on any goal posts that is more than 10 yards away from the nearest boundary).

FLAG FOOTBALL GAME EQUIPMENT

GAME BALL (NFHS 1-3-1)

The game ball for girls flag football shall meet the following measurement specifications:

Weight	12-14 oz
Long Circumference	26-27"
Long Axis	10-11"
Short Circumference	19-20"
Inflation Pressure	10-13 psi

When ordering footballs, the ball that meets these size specifications is the **youth-size (size 7)** football.

To be legal, the ball must also:

- Be tan-colored and made of leather or rubber
- Have either 8 or 12 laces
- Have a 1" stripe located on the two panels adjacent to the laces
- Contain only the following permissible items:
 - Ball manufacturer's name and/or logo
 - School name, logo and/or mascot
 - Conference name and/or logo
 - State association name and/or logo
 - NFHS name and/or logo

NOTE 1: Beginning in 2027, the PIAA will require a specific ball for post-season competition. This determination has not yet been made.

NOTE 2: Beginning in 2028, in order to be legal, the NFHS Authenticating Mark will be required to appear on the ball. The NFHS Authenticating Mark is shown below.



For a complete description of game ball requirements, please refer to NFHS 1-3-1 on pages 11 and 12 of the 2025-26 NFHS Flag Football Rules Book.

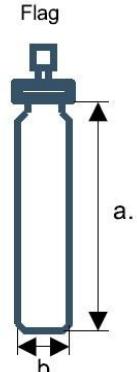
FLAG BELTS (NFHS 1-5-1f)

The PIAA has approved the pop-socket-style flag belt with 3 flags. The flags should be worn with 1 flag on each hip and 1 flag on the tailbone.

NOTE: For the 2026 season only, the pop-socket-style flag belt with 2 flags (1 flag on each hip) is permitted. If a team with a 3-flag belt plays a team with a 2-flag belt, the team with the 3-flag belt will remove the flag on the tailbone from their belt for that game.

The minimum dimensions of the flags are as follows (dimensions refer to the image at right):

Flag Length from Socket (a)	14"
Flag Width (b)	1 1/2"



All flags on a player's belt must be the same solid color. It is recommended that all of a team's flags be the same solid color. A color of a player's pants/shorts/skirt must clearly contrast with the color of the player's flags and flag belt.

JERSEYS (NFHS 1-5-1a)

Players' jerseys must be numbered 0-99 and no number preceded by the digit 0 is legal. No two players may participate in the same down while wearing identical numbers. Jerseys must be tucked in to the uniform bottom.

The home team may not wear white and the visiting team shall wear white. The specifics of jersey and number coloring requirements, uniform patches and number sizes may be found in NFHS 1-5-1a and b on pages 13-15. Refer to NFHS 1-5-3a for all things that would make the uniform (jersey and pants/shorts/skirt) illegal.

NOTE: There will be some flexibility provided for teams in the 2026 season regarding uniform coloring.

SUMMARY OF OTHER REQUIRED PLAYER EQUIPMENT

- Players must wear mouthguards (1-5-1c).
- Pants/shorts/skirts shall not have pockets of any type, exposed drawstrings, belts and/or belt loops and must clearly contrast with the color of a player's flags and flag belt (1-5-1d)
- Shoes are required for all players. For specific shoe requirements, refer to 1-5-1e on page 16.

SUMMARY OF OPTIONAL PLAYER EQUIPMENT

- Forearm pads
- Hip pads and tailbone protector
- Knee pads
- Arm sleeves
- Thigh guards
- Soft headwear
- Rubber, cloth or elastic bands to control hair
- Head coverings worn for religious reasons
- Gloves
- Tape, bandage or support wrap to protect and existing injury

NOTE: Refer to NFHS 1-5-2 on pages 17-18 for specific parameters for all listed equipment)

SUMMARY OF ILLEGAL PLAYER EQUIPMENT

- Illegal pads and padding (as defined in NFHS 1-5-3b on page 18)
- Ball-colored headwear, jerseys, patches, exterior arm covers/pads, undershirts or gloves
- Electronic audio or non-fixed video communication devices used to communicate with a player (except during a legal conference)
- Any audio (microphone) or video (camera) device worn by a player during a game
- Eye shade (grease or no-glare stickers) that includes words, number, logos or other symbols within the eye shade
- Jerseys, undershirts or exterior arm covers/pads manufactured to enhance contact with the football or opponent (through 2026). Effective 2027, jerseys or pads manufactured to enhance contact with the football or opponent
- Jewelry. Religious medals and medical-alert indicator are not considered jewelry. Religious medals or other religious items must be taped to the body and worn under the uniform. A medical-alert indicator must be taped to the body and may be visible.
- Metal which is projecting or other hard substance on clothes or person
- Play cards not worn on the wrist or arm
- A face shield that is not molded to the face or has protrusions

- Equipment not worn as intended by the manufacturer

NOTE: Refer to NFHS 1-5-3 on pages 18-19 for specific parameters for all listed equipment

COACH'S RESPONSIBILITY REGARDING EQUIPMENT

Prior to the start of the game, the head coach must verify to the referee and one other official that all of their players are legally equipped in compliance with NFHS rules and will use no illegal equipment.

If a player is discovered to be using illegal equipment in the game after this pregame verification, the head coach will be charged with an unsportsmanlike conduct foul.

OVERTIME PROCEDURE

If the score is tied after the end of the 4th period, the following procedure will be used to determine a winner.

Article 1. Intermission.

If a game ends with a tie score, there will be an immediate 3-minute intermission. During this time, the officials will review the overtime procedures among themselves and then the line judge and back judge will go to their sideline to answer any questions from their coach and obtain a team captain for the coin toss.

Article 2. Coin Toss.

A coin will be tossed by the referee to determine the options as in the start of the game. The visiting captain shall call the toss. There will be only 1 coin flip during the overtime. If additional overtime periods are played, captains will alternate choices. The winner of the toss shall be given options of offense, defense or direction. The loser of the toss shall make a choice of the remaining options. Both series in an overtime period will be played at the same end of the field. If multiple overtime periods are played, the loser of the overtime coin toss will have the first option (offense, defense or direction) in all even-numbered overtime periods, and the winner of the overtime coin toss will have the first option in all odd-numbered overtime periods. If multiple overtime periods are needed, the intermission will be just long enough to obtain options from each coach.

Article 3. Tie Breaker.

Unless moved by penalty, each team shall start 1st and goal from B's 20-yard line. The object will be to score a touchdown. An overtime period consists of a series of 4 downs by each team. If the score is still tied after 1 period, play will proceed to a 2nd period or as many as are needed to determine a winner. If the 1st team awarded the ball scores, the opponent will still have a chance to win the game. A Try will be attempted and scored as indicated in Rule 8. When B secures possession, the ball is dead and the series is over. The ball will be placed at B's 20-yard line, and the original defense will begin their series of 4 downs, if available.

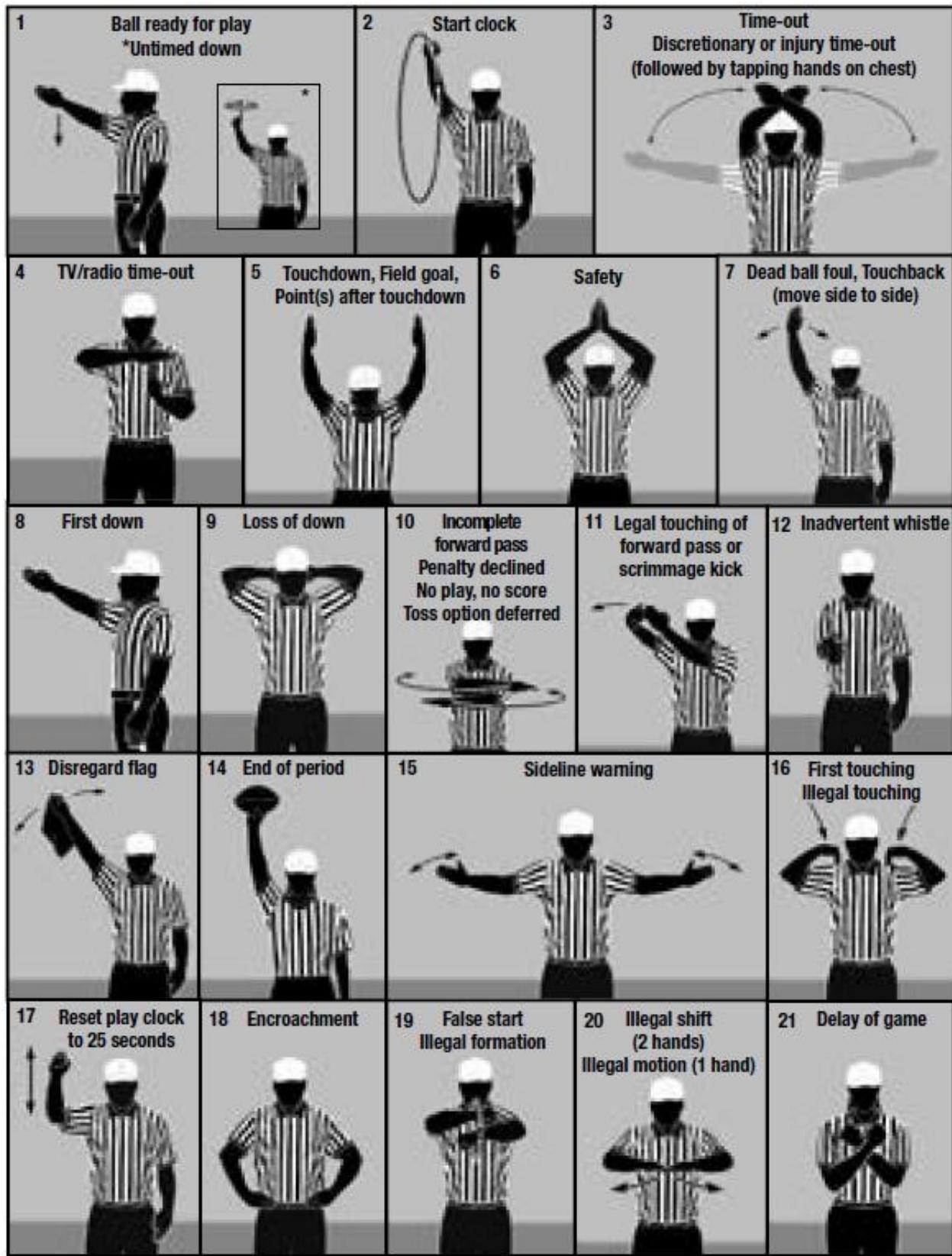
Article 4. Time-Outs.

Each team is entitled to only 1 time-out during each overtime period. Unused time-outs do not carry over from regulation or between overtime periods.

Article 5. Fouls and Penalties.

Fouls and penalties are administered similar to the regular game. A shall be awarded a new series of 4 downs when an automatic 1st down foul is accepted. Dead ball fouls following a touchdown are penalized on the Try. Dead ball fouls following a successful Try will be penalized from the succeeding spot, B's 20-yard line, if accepted. NOTE: The goal line shall always be zone-to-gain in overtime, regardless of the number of overtimes played.

NFHS OFFICIAL FLAG FOOTBALL SIGNALS



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22 Substitution infraction 	23 Disconcerting act 	24 Unsportsmanlike conduct Noncontact foul 	25 Illegal participation 
26 Sideline interference (Face press box) 	27 Illegal batting/kicking (Followed by pointing toward toe for kicking) 	28 Forward pass interference Kick catching interference 	29 Roughing passer 
30 Illegal pass/forward handing (Face press box) 	31 Intentional grounding 	32 Personal foul 	33 Holding 
34 Illegal block Illegal use of hands/arms 	35 Helping runner Interlocked blocking 	36 Tripping 	
37 Disqualification 		38 Flag guarding 	

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APPENDIX A. INSTRUCTIONS FOR GAME CLOCK OPERATORS

In most cases, if the game clock is not running, it will start on the snap. If it is running, it should continue to run subject to the situations outlined below.

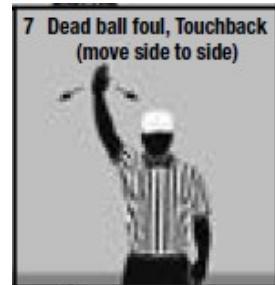
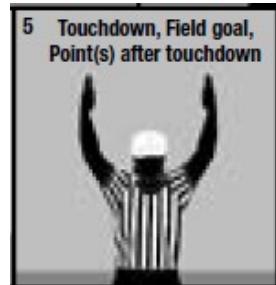
Prior to the 2-minute time-out in the 2nd and 4th quarter, the game clock starts on the snap in the following circumstances:

- Either team is awarded a new series after a legal kick
- B or R is awarded a new series
- The ball becomes dead behind a goal line
- A period ends
- A team attempts to consume time illegally
- The penalty for a delay-of-game foul is accepted
- The two-minute time-out occurs
- A charged team time-out is granted

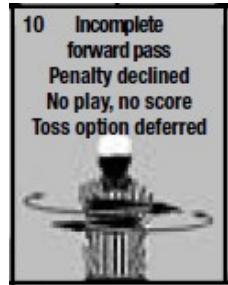
In addition to the circumstances listed above, the game clock will start on the snap after the two-minute time-out in the following circumstances:

- The ball goes out of bounds (EXCEPTION: a forward fumble goes out of bounds as in 4-3-1 EXCEPTION)
- A legal/illegal forward pass is incomplete
- A runner goes out of bounds
- The offended team elects to have the game clock start on the snap after any foul when the clock would have otherwise started on the ready-for-play

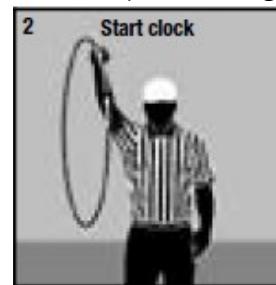
Regardless of the time of the game, you should stop the game clock if any of the officials give any of the following signals:



After the two-minute time-out, this signal also stops the game clock:



If the clock is stopped, and the referee gives the start clock signal (show below), start the game clock.



The game clock does not run during a try.

DEAD-BALL FOULS WHEN THE CLOCK IS NOT RUNNING

If the game clock is stopped and will restart on the snap, and a dead-ball foul occurs just before the snap so you accidentally start the clock, feel free to reset the game clock without being told to by the referee.

GAME CLOCK MALFUNCTIONS

In the event the game clock malfunctions (“jumps” or ceases to work), it will probably be noticed by the game officials and they will stop the game at that point. The referee will communicate with you. If the clock cannot be repaired in a reasonable time, the officials will keep the time on the field. If the officials don’t respond to the inoperative clock, alert them via the public address announcer or other means. When the game clock becomes operable, alert the officials and resume timing the game at a convenient stoppage. This restart should be coordinated with the game officials.

HALFTIME

At the end of the half, wait for the referee to declare the half over. At that point, put 10 minutes on the clock and then be prepared to start the halftime countdown on the referee’s signal. The countdown clock shall run until it reaches 0:00. At that time, reset the game clock to 12:00 and be ready for the snap to start the 3rd quarter.

OVERTIME

If the 4th quarter ends with a tie score, wait for the referee to declare the half over. At that point, put 3 minutes on the clock and start it immediately. When it reaches 0:00, leave it. The game clock will not run in overtime.

PIAA 35-POINT MERCY RULE

Upon completion of the first half of an interscholastic flag football game at any level of competition or anytime during the second half when a team gains a 35-point differential over its opponent, the clock shall be stopped only when an official’s time-out is taken, a charged time-out is granted, a period ends or a score occurs. Once implemented, the mercy rule remains in effect, even if the differential becomes less than 35 points.

Examples:

1. Incomplete pass (after two-minute time-out) – clock continues to run.
2. Ball carrier goes out of bounds (after two-minute time-out) – clock continues to run.
3. First down (after two-minute time-out) – stop clock for 1st down, start clock on ready-for-play.
4. Ball carrier makes 1st down then goes out of bounds (after two-minute time-out) – stop clock for 1st down, start clock on ready-for-play.
5. After a punt or any other change of possession – stop clock and start on ready-for-play.
6. After a score – stop clock, remains stopped during the try.

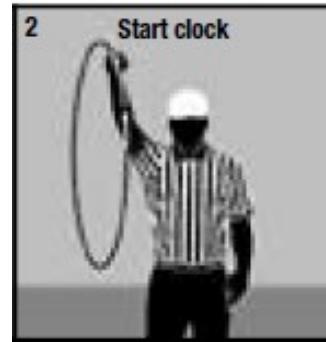
Note: Nos. 1 and 2 above are the primary situations where the clock continues to run.

When does the clock restart? Generally, whenever it would if any of the stoppages occurred during regular game play.

1. After an official’s time-out – on the ready-for-play.
2. After a charged time-out – on the snap.
3. After the end of the 3rd period – on the snap to start the 4th period.
4. After a score – on the snap from the starting spot.

APPENDIX B. INSTRUCTIONS FOR PLAY CLOCK OPERATORS

The play clock should always be set at 25 seconds. The play clock begins when the ball is marked ready for play by the referee. Find the referee and watch for either of these signals once the ball spotters have been set:

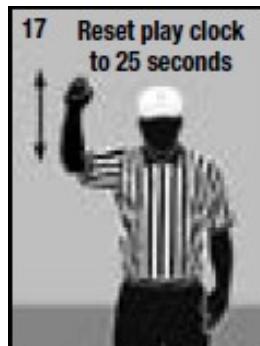


If there is a flag for delay of game because the play clock has expired, leave the display at :00 until the penalty is enforced and the referee gives the final announcement.

If, when the play clock is running, any official gives the stop the clock signal (shown below), stop and reset the play clock to :25 unless there is a flag for delay of game.



If the play clock is running and the referee wants it to be reset to :25, the referee will signal with one open palm in an over-the-head pumping motion (shown below). In that case, reset the play clock to :25 and wait for a ready-for-play signal before starting the play clock.



If the game clock is running with less than :25 remaining in any period, the play clock should not run, but if the game clock is not running, the :25-second play clock may need to run. Be alert at the end of any quarter.

The play clock will be used in overtime.