

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS
INTRAMURAL SPORTS

MEN'S & WOMEN'S FLAG FOOTBALL RULES

The NIRSA *Flag and Touch Football Rules* with intramural modifications will govern play.

Each player must present his/her [valid UMass UCard](#) to participate in each and every intramural contest.

For the full list of intramural policies and procedures, please read the [Intramural Captains Guide](#).

Team captains are responsible for the conduct and eligibility of their teams and adherence to the rules governing play.

I. TEAM

- A. A team shall consist of seven (7) players.
 - 1. A game cannot begin without at least five (5) players present per team. Once five (5) players are present, the game must begin. If, at any time during the game, a team does not maintain the minimum number of players, that team shall forfeit the game regardless of the score. Additional players may enter the game whenever play is dead and with official's consent.

II. EQUIPMENT

- A. The official ball is the one supplied by the Intramural Program. Teams may use their own leather or rubber covered football when they are on offense, as long as it has been 'cleared' by the game officials. Men's teams must use a regulation sized football. Women's teams may use a regulation, junior or youth sized football.
- B. Each player must wear a one-piece belt at the waistline with three flags permanently attached, one flag on each side and one in the center of the back. No article of clothing may cover any portion of a player's flag-belt.
- C. Jerseys may not have pockets, holes, zippers, or a button placket.
- D. Sandals, boots and metal-cleated shoes are prohibited! Athletic shoes **must** be worn at all times. Molded rubber/plastic cleats must not be more than ½ inch in length.
- E. Each player must wear pants or shorts without any belt(s), belt loop(s), pocket(s), or exposed drawstrings.
- F. A player wearing illegal equipment shall not be permitted to play. Illegal equipment includes any equipment, in the official's opinion, which is dangerous or confusing. Jewelry (including rings, bracelets, necklaces, watches and earrings) is illegal. Taping of earrings and other jewelry is not permitted regardless of the reason. Baseball hats or headwear containing exposed knots are not permitted. A player may wear knitted caps and head bands.

III. GAME DURATION

- A. Playing time shall consist of two, twenty-minute (20) halves with a two (2) minute intermission between halves. The winner of the pre-game coin toss shall have the choice of options for the first half or shall defer his/her option to the second half. The options are either to choose whether or not his/her team will start on offense or defense, or to choose the goal his/her team will defend. The captain not having the first choice of options for a half shall exercise the remaining option.
 - 1. The game clock will run continuously in each half (except under 2 minutes in 2nd half) unless time is stopped for a(n):
 - a. Team timeout - starts on the snap
 - b. Official's timeout - starts at his/her discretion
 - c. Mercy Rule – if the score differential is 19 points or greater with five (5) minutes or less to play in the 2nd half, the game shall end.
 - 2. Two Minute Warning - approximately 2 minutes before the end of the 2nd half, the official shall stop the clock and inform both teams of the time remaining. Whether the clock starts on the snap or the ready-for-play depends on the previous play.

3. **Last 2 Minutes of 2nd Half** - the clock will stop, and start on the snap for a/an:
- | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------|-----------|
| Incomplete legal or illegal pass | Out-of-bounds | Safety |
| Team B is awarded a new series | Team timeout | Touchback |
- Either team is awarded a new series following a punt
 Touchdown - *starts on the snap (after the try)*
 First down - *dependent on the previous play*
 Penalty and administration – *dependent on the previous play*
 Team A is awarded a new series - *dependent of the previous play*
 Inadvertent whistle - *starts on the ready*
 Official's timeout - *starts at his/her discretion*

B. TIMEOUTS

1. Two (2) timeouts of one-minute duration are allowed per team, per game. An additional timeout is awarded per overtime period.

C. TIE GAMES

1. **League Play** - If the score is tied at the end of the second half, an **overtime period** shall be played. Each team will have one series of downs to score from the 10-yard line. A coin toss shall be used to determine offense, defense and direction. If the score is tied at the end of the overtime period, the game will be declared a tie. The overtime period is played toward the same goal line; teams shall not switch ends of the field.
2. **Championship Play** - If the score is tied at the end of regulation, **overtime** shall be played (see rule III C1). If the score is tied at the end of the first overtime period, play shall continue using this **tiebreaker offensive series of four downs** to score from the 10-yard line, unless moved by penalty. The ball shall be put in play from the 10-yard line, first down and goal to go. An offensive series ends when a touchdown or safety is scored, the offensive team fails to score with four downs, or a change of team possession occurs during any down. If the first team awarded the ball scores a touchdown, the opponent will still have a chance to win the game with the offensive series beginning at the 10-yard line, unless moved by penalty. Extra-point tries will be attempted and scored as usual. If the defense intercepts a pass or fumble and returns it for a touchdown, they win the game. If they do not return it for a touchdown, the ball will be placed at the 10-yard line to begin their series of downs, if available. If the defense intercepts a try for point the try is over and the defense will now have possession of the ball. As many tie breaker series will be played as necessary to break a tie. The tiebreaker ends when one team establishes a lead and the opposing team is not entitled to further downs.

D. SUBSTITUTIONS - Any number of legal substitutions for either team may enter the game between halves, after a score or try, or during the interval between downs or change of possession. An incoming substitute must enter the field directly from the team area. A replaced player must leave the field immediately at the sideline nearest his/her team area prior to the ball being snapped. During the interval between downs, no substitute shall become a player and then withdraw, and no player shall withdraw and then re-enter as a substitute unless a penalty is accepted, there is a charged time-out, or a period ends.

E. AUTHORIZED CONFERENCES – During a charged timeout or following a score or try, one or more players, substitutes and coaches may meet directly in front of the team area within 5 yards of the sideline; or during a charged timeout, one coach may enter the field at his/her team huddle to confer with no more than 7 players (co-rec 8 players).

F. LATENESS - If a team fails to have the minimum number of players (5) present within 5 minutes of the scheduled time, the game shall be declared forfeited to the team ready to play.

IV. GAME PLAY & REGULATIONS

- A. Each half shall begin with the ball placed on the offensive team's '14'- yard line. There are no kickoffs, placekicks or free kicks; only declared 4th-down punts are allowed.
1. A team in possession of the ball shall have 4 consecutive scrimmage downs to advance to the next zone. The ball shall be put in play promptly and legally; failure to snap or punt within 25 seconds after the ball is declared ready for play shall be a delay of game.

2. The zone line to gain in a series shall be the zone in advance of the ball's most forward point, unless altered due to penalty. Should the most forward point of the ball be beyond the last zone line, then the opponent's goal line is the next line to gain. Yardage is always based on the location of the ball. The ball is not marked where a player is de-flagged, but where the ball is when the de-flag occurs.
3. A new series of downs shall be awarded when a team moves the ball into the next zone on a play free from penalty; or a penalty against the opposing team moves the ball into the next zone; or an accepted penalty against the opposing team involves an automatic first down; or either team has obtained legal possession of a ball as a result of a penalty, touchback, pass interception, fumble, or failure to gain the zone in advance of the ball.
4. Snapping the Ball - the ball shall be put in play by a legal snap. The snapper, after assuming legal position for the snap and adjusting the ball, may neither move nor change the position of the ball in a manner simulating the beginning of a play until it is snapped. An infraction of this provision may be penalized, whether or not the ball is snapped, and the penalty for any resultant encroachment foul by an opponent shall be cancelled. When over (or beside) the ball, the snapper shall have his/her feet behind his/her scrimmage line (first ball spotter-orange). The snapper shall pass the ball back from its position on the ground with a quick and continuous motion of the hand(s). The ball shall leave the hand(s) in this motion. The player receiving the ball must be at least 2 yards deep from the center.

B. SCRIMMAGE LINE/NUMBER OF PLAYERS - the offensive team must have at least four (4) players on their scrimmage line.

1. An orange disc shall mark the offensive team's scrimmage line.
2. One offensive player may be in motion at the snap, but not in motion toward the opponent's goal line. Other offensive players must be stationary in their positions without movement of the feet, body, head, or arms.
3. All seven (7) offensive players must, at some point after the ready-for-play whistle, be within 15-yards of the orange disc. (This designates that they will be involved in the next play)
4. The defensive team's line shall be spotted to provide a one-yard neutral zone. The neutral zone extends to each sideline and is established when the ball is marked ready for play. No player shall have any part of his/her body in the neutral zone.

C. PUNTS

1. A snap needs to be performed during a punt.
2. Neither team shall advance beyond their scrimmage line until the ball is kicked.
3. Players shall ignore any signals given by the kickers or receivers. The ball remains live. However, the player will receive an penalty for an unfair act and be penalized a 10 yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty. *There are no fair catches.*

D. LIVE BALL/DEAD BALL

1. A dead ball, after having been declared ready for play, becomes a live ball when it is snapped or punted legally.
2. A **live ball becomes dead** and an official shall sound the whistle or declare it dead when:
 - a. it goes out of bounds.
 - b. any part of the runner other than a hand(s) or foot(feet) touches the ground.
 - c. a touchdown, touchback, safety, or successful try is made.
 - d. the ball carrier's flag is legally removed.
 - e. a passer is de-flagged prior to releasing the ball.
 - f. a fumbled ball touches the ground or is caught simultaneously by opposing players. The ball is dead at the spot where the ball hits the ground or is caught.
 - g. a snapped ball from scrimmage touches the ground before or after it is touched by another player. The ball is dead at the spot where it hits the ground.
 - h. a forward, backward, or lateral pass is incomplete or caught simultaneously by opposing players.

- i. a forward pass is legally completed, or a loose ball is caught by a player on, above, or behind the opponent's goal line.
- j. a player on the punting team touches the ball after it crosses the neutral zone.
- k. **a punt comes to rest on the ground and no player attempts to touch and/or recover it.** *A punt that merely strikes the ground does not cause the ball to become dead unless in the end zone.*
- l. a live ball not in player possession touches anything in-bounds other than a player or official.
- m. an official sounds his/her whistle inadvertently during a down or during a down in which the penalty for a foul is declined.

E. OUT-OF-BOUNDS

- 1. A player is out-of-bounds when any part of him/her touches anything, other than another player or game official, on or outside a boundary line.
- 2. A ball in player possession is out-of-bounds when either the ball or any part of the runner touches the ground or anything else, other than another player or game official, on or outside a boundary line.
- 3. A loose ball is out-of-bounds when it touches the ground or anything, including a player or game official, which is on or outside a boundary line.

F. CATCH/INTERCEPTION

- 1. A catch of an opponent's fumble or pass is an interception.
- 2. To catch or intercept a ball, a player who leaves his feet to make a catch or interception must have the ball in his/her possession when he/she returns to the ground in-bounds.
 - a. If one foot lands completely in-bounds and the receiver has possession and control of the ball, it is a catch or interception even though a subsequent step or fall takes the receiver out of bounds.
- 3. A catch by any kneeling or prone in-bounds player is a completion or interception, and the play is over.
- 4. *If Team B intercepts a pass or fumble during the try the try is over and Team B now has possession at the 14.*

G. REMOVING THE FLAG BELT

- 1. A person is considered "stopped" when the clasp of the flag belt comes undone by an opposing player. The ball is spotted at the point at which the flag was removed. Players must have possession of the ball before they can legally be de-flagged.
- 2. The person removing the flag should immediately drop the flag.
- 3. Tackling is prohibited!
- 4. The ball carrier may not protect the flag in any way. Straight-arming, flag guarding with the forearm, ball, elbow or clothing, running with the head down, or running into the defender purposely, is illegal.
- 5. A player may not leave his/her feet to go airborne over another player who is positioned to make a play on the runner (Hurdling).
- 6. A defensive player may not intentionally pull the receiver's flag before a pass is caught.
- 7. If an offensive pass receiver inadvertently loses the flag before catching a pass the play continues. The de-flagging reverts to a one-hand tag of the runner between the shoulders and the knees.
- 8. Tampering with the flag belt in any way to gain an advantage including tying, using foreign materials, or other such acts is illegal.

H. OFFENSIVE SCREEN BLOCKING - **the offensive screen block shall take place WITHOUT contact.** The screen blocker shall have his/her hands and arms at his/her side or behind his/her back. Any use of the hands, arms, elbows, legs, or body to **initiate contact** during an offensive player's screen block is illegal. A player must be on his/her feet before, during and after screen blocking.

- I. **USE OF ARMS OR HANDS BY THE DEFENSE** - defensive players must go around the offensive player's screen block. The arms and hands may not be used as a wedge to contact the opponent.
- J. **BACKWARD PASS**
1. A runner may pass the ball in any direction except if intentionally thrown out-of-bounds to conserve time.
 2. A backward pass or fumble which touches the ground between the goal lines is dead at the spot where it touches the ground and belongs to the team last in possession unless lost on downs.
- K. **ILLEGAL FORWARD PASS** occurs:
1. If the passer's foot is beyond Team A's scrimmage line when the ball leaves his/her hand.
 2. If thrown after team possession has changed during the down.
 3. If intentionally thrown to the ground or out-of-bounds to save loss of yardage.
 4. If a passer catches his/her untouched forward or backward pass.
 5. If there is more than one forward pass per down.
- L. **SCORING**
1. **Touchdown** - **6 points** shall be scored when a runner advances from the field of play so that the ball penetrates the vertical plane of the opponent's goal line. It is a touchdown when a player catches a loose ball while the ball is on or behind the opponent's goal line.
 2. **Try** - The opportunity to score 1 point from the 3-yard line, 2 points from the 10-yard line or 3 points from the 20-yard line by running or passing. While time is out, there shall be one scrimmage play, unless changed by penalty. Once the choice for 1, 2 or 3 points is made, this choice can only be changed when a charged Team A or Team B timeout is taken. A team's choice cannot be changed if a penalty should occur. Enforcement of yardage penalties does not change the value of the try. If Team B intercepts a pass or fumble during the try and returns it for a touchdown, Team B scores 3 points.
 3. **Safety** - **2 points** shall be scored when:
 - a. a runner carries the ball from the field of play to or across his/her own goal line, and it becomes dead there in his/her team's possession.
Exception: The Momentum Rule - when a Team B player intercepts a forward pass or catches a punt between his/her 5-yard line and the goal line and his/her original momentum carries him/her into the end-zone where the ball is declared dead in his/her team's possession or it goes out-of-bounds in the end-zone, the ball belongs to Team B at the spot where the pass was intercepted or the punt was caught.
 - b. a player forces a loose ball from the field of play to or across his/her goal line by his/her punt, pass, fumble, muff, snap, or bat and the ball becomes dead there in his/her team's possession on or behind the goal line.
 - c. a player on offense commits any foul for which the penalty is accepted and measurement is from a spot in his/her end-zone; or throws an illegal forward pass from his/her end-zone and the penalty is declined in a situation which leaves him/her in possession at the spot of the illegal pass and with the ball having been forced into the end-zone by the passing team.
 - d. When a safety is scored the ball belongs to the defending team at its own '12'-yard line.

V. PLAYER CONDUCT

- A. **No Mouth Rule** - Players are required to act in a civil manner toward other players and officials. Any player "mouthing off" shall be ejected from the game. Taunting and "trash talking" will not be tolerated. Captains may ask for a rule interpretation if it is done in a courteous manner. Further, two players ejected for the same reason will cause their team to forfeit the game.
1. It is up to the discretion of the official(s) if a substitute shall be permitted to replace the ejected player.
 2. An ejected player, and her/his team, shall be suspended from further play until he/she meets with the Campus Recreation staff.

Rationale: This rule seeks to prevent players from baiting and taunting each other and/or berating game officials and staff. Such behavior could create bad feelings and lead to potentially explosive situations. This is an attempt to prevent players from committing unsportsmanlike acts toward each other and/or the officials.

THE THIRD UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT FOUL BY THE SAME TEAM RESULTS IN AN AUTOMATIC FORFEITURE OF THE GAME.

VI. SUMMARY OF PENALTIES

A. Loss of Down

Fouls by Team A which include loss of down are:

Illegal forward pass (also loss of 5 yards)
Intentionally grounding forward pass – to prevent loss of yardage (also loss of 5 yards)
Intentionally throwing backward pass out of bounds (also loss of 5 yards)
Illegally secured flag belt (also loss of 10 yards) [also game ejection]
Offensive pass interference (also loss of 10 yards)

B. Automatic First Downs (Defensive Fouls)

Defensive pass interference
Striking, kicking, kneeing, elbowing, etc.
Tackling (also 10 yards) [also game ejection]
Roughing the passer (also 10 yards)
Flagrant unsportsmanlike conduct (also 10 yards and game ejection)

C. Loss of 5 yards

Delay of game
Substitution rules infraction
Less than required number of players on scrimmage line
Team A player illegally goes out of bounds
False start or simulating start of play
Offside (offense) at the snap
Offensive player illegally in motion at the snap
Encroachment (defense)
Intentionally throwing backward pass out of bounds (also LOD if by Team A)
Illegal snap
Illegal kick
Illegal forward pass (also loss of down if by Team A)
Illegal backward pass (also loss of down if by Team A)
Intentionally grounding forward pass (also loss of down if by Team A)
Interlocked interference of helping runner
Offensive player not within 15 yards of ball
Failure to wear required equipment

D. Loss of 10 yards

Taunting and/or baiting an opponent
Excessive an/or inappropriate language and/or behavior
Spiking the ball
Illegal participation
Illegal contact
Illegal use of hands
Holding (offense)
Holding (loose ball)
Two or more consecutive encroachments during the same interval between scrimmage downs
Illegally guarding, protecting flag belt

Illegal flag belt removal
Tackling (also first down) [also player game ejection]
Hurdling opponent
Offensive pass interference (also loss of down)
Defensive pass interference (also first down)
Striking, kicking, kneeing, elbowing, tripping, clipping an opponent (also first down)
Roughing the passer (also first down)
Roughing opponent who has gone out of bounds (also first down)
Concealing the ball
Illegally secured flag belt [also game ejection] (also loss of down if by Team A)
Flagrant unsportsmanlike player conduct (also game ejection)
Fighting (also game ejection)
Intentionally kicking at or swinging an arm, hand, or fist at an opposing player (also game ejection)
Intentionally contacting an official (also game ejection)
Flagrant personal fouls (also game ejection)

E. Disqualification Associated with Certain 10 Yard Penalties

Flagrant unsportsmanlike player conduct
Intentionally kicking at or swinging an arm, hand or fist at any opposing player
Flagrant spiking, kicking, throwing or not returning ball to official
Flagrant unsportsmanlike conduct by players, coaches, substitutes or others
subject to the rules
Intentionally contacting an official
Flagrant personal fouls
Tackling the runner
Intentionally tampering with flagbelt – offense (also loss of down and game
ejection)
Intentionally tampering with flagbelt – defense (also automatic first down and
game ejection)

GOOD LUCK AND ENJOY THE FLAG FOOTBALL SEASON!

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