

Flag Football (Skills & Team)

Revised 2025

Special Olympics
Iowa



Registration Entries



Entry forms are available online at www.soioawa.org

- ▶ Website: Competitions tab > click Participation Forms
- ▶ Flag Football Assessment included with entry
- ▶ Entries can be emailed to: registrations@soioawa.org

~OR~

- ▶ Mailed to the State Office (551 SE Dovetail Road, PO Box 620, Grimes, Iowa)
- ▶ After your entries have been put into GMS you will be sent a Delegation Report.
 - ▶ Review the report and return to the State Office with any corrections

Events



- Flag Football Team (Traditional)
- Unified
- Flag Football Skills

Equipment



- An intermediate (youth) size football will be used in all divisions
- A protective mouthpiece must be worn at all times, provided by delegation – Special Smiles also provides mouthpieces (contact the State Office)
- A one-piece, three-flag belt will be worn during the game at all times (ex. [Gopher Sports, Flag Football Belts](#))
- All participants must have a playing uniform consisting of matching shirts/shorts/pants and matching numbers on front and back which can be tucked in at the waist to avoid obstruction of Flag Pulling
- No jewelry may be worn
- No blue jeans will be allowed
- All players must wear athletic shorts without pockets
- No cleats or hiking boots allowed

Rosters



Traditional Teams:

- The team roster may contain a maximum of 12 players
- Teams must have five players to start the game
 - Teams may continue with a minimum of four players, if necessary due to disqualification or injury

Unified Sports Teams:

- The team roster may contain a maximum of 12 players
- The roster should contain a proportionate number of athletes and partners
- During competition, teams should have five players to start the game
 - a. The line-up shall never exceed three athletes and two partners at any time
 - b. Teams may continue with a minimum of four players, if necessary due to disqualification or injury
- Failure to adhere to the required ratio results in a forfeit

Field



- The playing field is 60 yards long (including the end zones) and 25 yards wide
- A space of at least five yards around the field must be free and clear of obstructions
- The field can be marked with chalk, paint, and/or traffic cones
- We **do not** play no-run zones in Iowa
- The Offensive Coach can be on the field or in the huddle (Iowa rule)
- The Defensive Coach must be outside the boundaries (on the sideline with the team)

Competition



- Level 1 – High:** Plays by regulation rules; high to excellent skills and athleticism; implements strategies; runs specific plays; several players can catch a pass while running; reacts to the way the other team plays; quarterback with accurate and strong arm; defense able to play aggressively without being physical.
- Level 2 – Average:** Plays by regulation rules; average skills and athleticism; some strategy; runs general plays; a couple of players can catch a pass while running; limited ability to react to the way the other team plays; quarterback with accurate or strong arm; defense has difficulty playing aggressively without being physical.
- Level 3 – Low:** Following rules is a challenge; lows skills and athleticism, little strategy; no organized plays; players not able to catch a pass while running; not influenced by the way the other team plays; quarterback with limited accuracy and arm strength; defensive skills limited. The coach will be on the field at all times.

The Game



Special Olympics Flag Football is a **non-contact** sport

Possessions:

- a. All possessions, except following an interception, start at the offensive team's five yard line
- b. The offense has four plays to cross mid-field
- c. Once the offense crosses mid-field, they have four additional plays to score a touchdown
- d. If the offensive team fails to cross mid-field or score a touchdown in a prescribed number of plays, possession of the ball changes and the opposite teams starts at their five yard line
- e. The ball carrier may not spin, dive, hurdle, stiff arm, or use either arm to shield a defender from grasping his/her flag.** An athlete is allowed to dive for a thrown ball
- f. The ball is marked at the spot where the position of the ball is when the player is declared down (carrier's flag belt is pulled or hand/knee touches ground or intercepted or fumbled)

Scoring



Touchdown: Six points

Extra Point: One point from the five-yard line, two points from the 12-yard line (or any distance outside five yards due to a penalty)

Safety: Two points

Timing & Overtime



Special Olympics Iowa will follow option two of the SOI Flag Football rules which states:

- The game shall consist of two 20 minute halves (running time) until the last minute of each half at which the clock will stop on all dead ball whistles (i.e. incomplete pass, out of bounds, change of possession)

Overtime:

- If the score is tied at the end of regulation play:
 - a. A coin toss is held to determine first possession
 - b. Each team receives two plays from midfield and the team gaining the most points or gaining a yardage advantage is awarded one extra point and wins the game

Live Ball/Dead Ball



Dead Balls/Fumbles:

- There are no fumbles
- Play is ruled dead when:
 - The ball carrier's flag is pulled
 - The ball carrier loses his/her flag
 - The ball carrier steps out of bounds
 - The ball carrier's knee or hand touches the ground
 - A touchdown, extra point, or safety is scored
 - When during a try-for-point the defense obtains possession of the ball
 - When a forward pass strikes the ground or is caught simultaneously by opposing players (the offense retains possession)
 - A pass is intercepted
 - A receiver catches a ball without his/her flags attached
 - A snapped ball touches the ground
 - If fumbled forward, the ball is spotted where the ball carrier's feet were at the time of the fumble. If the ball falls backwards, it is marked where it hits the ground
 - When there is an inadvertent whistle

Running



Handling the ball by the offense:

- a. Handling the ball is transferring player possession from one teammate to another without throwing or kicking it
- b. Only direct handoffs behind the line of scrimmage are permitted. Handoffs may be in front, behind or to the side of the quarterback/offensive player, but must be behind the line of scrimmage
- c. The offense may use multiple handoffs behind the line of scrimmage
- d. "Center Sneak" – The ball must completely leave the center's hands on the snap and he/she must step backwards off the line of scrimmage in order to receive the direct handoff from the quarterback/offensive player before advancing the ball

Passing/Receiving



1. Passing and receiving by the offense:

- All passes must be forward and received beyond the line of scrimmage
- Shovel passes are allowed, but must be received beyond the line of scrimmage
- All players are eligible to receive a forward pass, including the quarterback, if he/she has legally handed-off
 - **Exception:** In Unified Sports divisions, if a partner throws a pass, only athletes are eligible receivers
- (High Level) Only one player is allowed in motion at the snap and he/she may not be moving toward the line of scrimmage at the snap
- A player must have at least one foot in bounds when making a catch
- Interceptions change possession of the ball at the point of the interception
 - **Exception:** A ball intercepted in the end zone is spotted at the five yard line

Passing/Receiving



2. Diving:

- A defensive or offensive player may dive to catch a pass
- Diving is illegal when used to down a player or advance a ball
- A player cannot dive in an attempt to gain extra yardage
- The team will be penalized accordingly

3. Eligible Receiver:

- All offensive players are eligible to receive a pass, except in Unified Sports divisions where partners are ineligible when partners are throwing the pass
 - Unified Sports teams are expected to comply with this rule without intervention by officials

Screen Blocking



- Legally obstructing an opponent without contacting him/her with any part of the screen blocker's body
- The screen blocker shall have his/her arms fully extended to the ground (below the waist) either at his/her side, in front, or behind his/her back
- **Any use of arms, elbows, legs, or shoulders to initiate contact during the screen block is illegal**
- A player must be on his/her feet before, during, and after screen blocking
- Screen blocking is the only form of legal blocking that can be used by any player at any time
- There are two forms of legal blocking:
 - Backfield Blocking
 - Downfield Blocking

Screen Blocking



Backfield Blocking: If any of the provisions listed are violated, and contact results, the screener has committed an illegal block.

- The screen blocker must give an opponent at least one step
- The screen blocker must not initiate contact with opponent
- The screen blocker may not take a position so close to a moving opponent that this opponent cannot avoid contact by stopping or changing directions
- After the snap of the ball, a blocker may move laterally or backward two steps

Downfield Blocking: A basketball style (non-moving) screen is the only acceptable form of downfield blocking. The blocker also may not run between a rusher and ball carrier impeding a defender's progress to the flag.

Formations



1. Line of Scrimmage:

- The line of scrimmage for each team is a vertical plane through the point of the ball nearest the team's goal line
- Each player on a team must be on its side of the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped

2. Motion:

- Only one player of the offensive team may be in motion at the snap
 - This player must be behind the line of scrimmage and not moving toward the line of scrimmage at the time the ball is snapped
 - If the player comes to a stop he/she must be set for one second

3. Shift:

- A shift is an action of 1 or more offensive players who after taking set positions move to a new position prior to the snap
- A player who shifts must reset for one second prior to the snap

4. Snap:

- A snap is the legal act of passing the ball through the Center's legs (not on the side) from the ground to the quarterback to start a play
 - [How To Snap A Football](#)

Penalties



Special Olympics Iowa will follow option one of the SOI Flag Football rules which states: Coaches will have the opportunity to decline or accept the penalty based on result of the play.

- The penalty may be accepted while the yardage is declined
- All penalties are assessed from the line of scrimmage
- No penalty may take the ball more than half the distance to the offender's goal line
- **All penalties are 10 yards**

Offensive Penalties and Protocol



Illegal Motion Offside	10 yards from line of scrimmage & loss of down
Illegal forward/backward pass	10 yards from line of scrimmage & loss of down
Illegal procedure	10 yards from line of scrimmage & loss of down
Pass interference	10 yards from line of scrimmage & loss of down
Illegal contact	10 yards from line of scrimmage & loss of down
Flag guarding/shielding	10 yards from line of scrimmage & loss of down
Delay of game	10 yards from line of scrimmage & loss of down

Defensive Penalties and Protocol



Offside	10 yards from line of scrimmage & Automatic First Down
Pass Interference	10 yards from line of scrimmage & Automatic First Down
Illegal Contact	10 yards from line of scrimmage & Automatic First Down
Illegal Flag Pull	10 yards from line of scrimmage & Automatic First Down
Illegal Rushing	10 yards from line of scrimmage & Automatic First Down

Terminology



Dead Ball: Refers to the period of time immediately before or after play.

Defense: The team opposing the offense to prevent them from advancing the ball.

Defer: Winner of coin toss is giving the choice to the other team for the first half of the game.

Downs (1,2,3,4): The offensive squad has four attempts or “downs” to advance the ball. They must cross midfield to get another four “downs” to score.

Inadvertent Whistle: Official’s whistle that is performed in error.

Lateral/Pitch: A BACKWARD PASS of the ball by the ball carrier.

Line of Scrimmage: An imaginary line running through the point of the football and across the width of the field.

Live Ball: Refers to the period of time that the play is in action.

Offense: The team with possession of the ball.

Terminology



Out of Bounds: The outer perimeter line of the field. They include the sidelines and the back of the end zone lines.

Passer: The offensive player that throws the ball and may or may not be the quarterback.

Quarterback: the offensive player first receiving possession of the ball. **The quarterback may not run the ball.**

Rusher: The defensive player(s) assigned to rush the quarterback to prevent him/her from passing the ball by pulling his/her flags or by blocking the pass.

Rush Line: An imaginary line running across the width of the field seven yards (into the defensive side) from the line of the scrimmage.

Shielding (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.

Shift: The action of one or more offensive players who after taking positions move to a new position prior to the snap.

Shovel Pass: A legal pass attempted beyond the line of scrimmage by throwing the ball underhand or pushing it towards a receiver in a shot put type manner.

Special Olympics North America Flag Football Rules:



To learn more about Flag Football it is highly recommended for you to read the Special Olympics North America Official Flag Football Rules:

- [Official Flag Football Rules](#)

Flag Football Skills



Divisions: Junior (8-21) Senior (22+)

Entries: Entry score for the athlete should be their best effort, time or score. Score is determined by adding three skills scores together.

Rules: The Official Special Olympics Sports rules for Flag Football shall govern all competitions.

Competition: Three events make up Flag Football Skills. Catching, Running and Throwing



Event #1: Catching

- Purpose is to measure an athlete's catching ability
- Equipment/Supplies: one tape measure, five footballs, two cones, lawn paint, one clipboard, scoresheet, and pencil
- Description
 - Athlete stands between and behind two cones, five yards from an official. Cones should be eight feet apart. The official throws the ball to the athlete alternating throws between the cones
- Athlete will catch the ball between the cones
- Athlete is thrown five balls
- Scoring
 - Five points for a caught ball
 - One point for a dropped ball
 - Zero points for a missed attempt
- Maximum score is 25
- Example: Athlete catches three passes, drops one pass, and misses one pass
- Score = $5 + 5 + 5 + 1 + 0 = 16$



Event #2: Running

- Purpose is to measure an athlete's field-running ability
- Equipment: One stopwatch, one clipboard, scoresheet, pencil, one football, and eight cones
- Description
 - Two sets of cones are staggered every five yards for 15 total yards
 - Athlete is timed as he/she leaves the first set of cones, runs through all the staggered cones, crossing back and forth through the last set of cones
 - Five seconds are deducted from missed cones or dropped ball
- Scoring
 - Start with 60. Subtract the amount of time it took the athlete to run through all the cones
 - Athlete is given two trials, with the best score recorded
 - Example: Athlete's time to run through all the cones is 38 seconds with no penalties
- Score = $60 - 38 = 22$



Event #3: Throwing

- Purpose is to measure an athlete's ability in throwing for distance & accuracy
- Equipment: two tape measures, two footballs, three marking cones, one clipboard, scoresheet, and pencil
- Description
 - 60-meter throwing line is setup
- Athlete throws the football as far and as straight as possible down the throwing line without stepping over the restraining line
 - Athlete can take one or more steps towards the restraining line
 - If the athlete crosses the restraining line, he/she can have a repeat throw
- Scoring
 - Mark the spot where the ball lands. Record the measurement on the throwing line that is perpendicular to the spot where the ball landed. Measure the distance from the throwing line to the spot where the ball landed. Subtract this distance in meters from the measurement on the throwing line. This is the athlete's score. If the score falls between meters, then the score is rounded down
 - Athlete is given two trials with the best score recorded
- Example: Athlete's ball lands perpendicular to the 25.40 meter point on the measuring tape and is 6.50 meters out
 - $\text{Score} = 25 - 6 = 19$

Athletes total score is 57 ($16 + 22 + 19 = 57$)

Quiz:



To take the quiz, click the link:

- [Flag Football](#)