

The First Flag Football Season: 2026

Deshler Flag Football Preview

For the first time in a long time, the Shoals area will get to experience a new high school sport. The 2026-2027 school year will be the first year of high school flag football in the Shoals. We will see three teams in high school and two in college. Deshler, Florence, and Muscle Shoals will be the high school teams. UNA and Northwest-Shoals Community College will be the college teams. Flag is one of the fastest-growing sports in the nation and will be part of the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles.

The Basics

With a new sport comes new rules and layouts. So what do you need to know about flag football? Flag football season is from late August to the end of October. It basically runs the same as football season and playoffs in November, before State Championships are the first week of December. It is then played on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, so it will not interfere with football. The biggest difference comes in quarter length and field length. Flag plays four quarters of ten minutes apiece with a brief halftime (five or so minutes). So a game goes quickly and can be finished in an hour or less. The field length is 80 yards by 40 yards where football is 100 yards by 50 yards. So if they play on a normal football field, the end zone will be the 10-yard line, and the back line of the end zone will be the normal goal line. The sides will go to the bottom of the numbers that indicate ten, twenty, thirty, etc. You also play with seven on the field at a time rather than 11 like normal football. Think quarterback, receivers, running back, tight end only, as well as a center to snap the ball.

Deshler Preview

What is flag football? Deshler head coach Shane Reid said he has been told it is like basketball on grass and really seven-on-seven football. However, the quarterback can run in flag football, unlike seven-on-seven. He compared the pace to basketball. "It's special to be a part of something new here with the tradition Deshler has across all sports. When I think of what it can become and start from the ground up, it gets really special." Coach Reid added about beginning a new sport. He also has two assistant coaches: Nikki Robertson, who is also an assistant softball coach, and Stuart Setliff, who teaches law enforcement at Deshler.

Coach Shane Reid is probably a familiar name in the Tuscumbia area. The last name at least. His son Garrett Reid graduated in May 2026 and will play college baseball at Samford. He was also multiple-time all-state and one of only 19 athletes to be all-state in three sports: football, basketball, baseball. He was also part of the 2025 Deshler Baseball Championship Team and was back to back 2025 and 2026 ASWA 4A player of the year. However, with Garrett going to college, Shane mentioned how family played a part in coaching. He has 25 years of coaching

and has always coached football. “The only quality time I’ll get to spend with Garrett will be weekends in the fall. I did not want to miss that time with my family. I could help Deshler out by having a football background and coaching flag while getting that time.”

How did they get a team? First, they had to declare the sports they were going to have before the state realigned/reclassified. That is handled by your athletic director and the AHSAA. Rumors began in the fall of 2025 for a team, and then it became public when the reclassifications were announced in late January of 2026. He was named head coach in late April, so the offseason has been rushed.

With new sports come challenges and advantages. One challenge Coach Reid mentioned was that it is new and something we are not used to or exposed to here. He mentioned how he has coached football and been a part of seven-on-sevens, but “we don’t know what we don’t know yet,” he added. The advantages will come in the numbers, being only three schools in the area having teams. There will not be a flooded market like there is with other sports. “I think our community, school, and girls will be one of a few to represent the community, school, area as a whole.” He also noted how he is wanting to see success for Florence and Muscle Shoals because it will boost the perception locally. He also wants Deshler to be the best locally but noted how it will boost competition with more schools adding it as well.

Flag is similar to tackle football but has its differences. He noted how he can probably answer that better after the season. However, he mentioned how seven-on-seven concepts are very similar. The drills are similar as well, like a tackling drill becomes a flag pulling drill with footwork.

The other difference is film study. Football plays week to week, where you have a week to plan. Flag plays two or three times a week. He has been a head basketball coach for seven years, where you have to gameplan day to day rather than week to week. “You have to consider the health/fatigue of the athletes. You cannot play Tuesday and have a high-intensity practice on Wednesday, then play again on Thursday.”

Flag football plays its season during football and volleyball in the fall. So athletes can still play multiple sports, whether it is basketball, softball, cross country, tennis, etc. Coach Reid added how they cannot play volleyball and flag due to the scheduling conflicts, but they can play basketball and be able to compete and get conditioning during flag season. “They will use different agilities/muscles in the flag.” They have even used basketball parallels in practice. He gave the other coaches credit as well, noting how Deshler coaches all pull for each other and the athletes. It can be a challenge with multi-sport athletes, but it takes communication and letting each other know. “Deshler coaches encourage our girls and guys to do multiple sports, when you’re here, give me all you have. Then go be a kid, whether it’s another sport or whatever,” he added.

Deshler will carry 25 players on their team from all grades seven through twelve. “Realistically, you need 12-14 you can sub in and out of a game.” Substitutions will be similar to

football, where you can sub in or out each play. Most players will play two-way, meaning offense and defense. “We’re trying to teach them the game right now and get participation up,” he added as well. The whole roster outside of maybe two or three players plays multiple sports as well.

One thing that may stand out will be that three of the athletes are notable in basketball. Reece Davis (Ole Miss basketball commit) and “the twins,” or Kacie and Kloie Nelson, who are already receiving offers for basketball. He gave Coach Jana Killen credit for allowing and encouraging the girls and Coach Reid to play and coach flag football. “Everything to me has been 100% supportive,” he added. All the major sports athletes work out together at Deshler during the 4th block. He wants them to be able to do their work for other sports also, whether it is basketball, softball, tennis, etc.

The state of Alabama is known for several things. One of them is football, but Deshler is approaching this from the ground up. They are teaching the players the basics and going from there. “They have general knowledge, but not game knowledge. My approach as a coach is if I do not tell you, then I cannot hold that against you.”

Gamedays will be similar to a basketball, baseball/softball gameday feel. Football game nights look like warm-ups beginning an hour before, but flag football will be maybe 45 minutes before or 30 minutes before if it is a road game. “I know it will not be Friday night in Tusculumbia or anywhere. I hope people give it a chance and test it out. I think when it is the local games, Deshler-Florence, Deshler-Muscle Shoals, I expect the same environment. I know it is outside, but I picture a basketball gym in the winter with excitement.” Coach Reid added. If you ask us at Shoals Sports Report, we would suggest getting there thirty minutes early to see a pregame, get concessions, etc. Admission at Deshler will probably be similar to basketball, baseball, and softball as well.

Deshler will play in the 1A-4A class due to there not being enough schools to play a 4A schedule. Deshler’s area will be Tanner, Scottsboro, Madison County, and JB Pennington. Coach Reid wants to see the sport grow locally to get more local teams to generate more interest and more fans at road games. He also encouraged people to travel with them because it is not a long game. “You can play at 6:00, be done by 7:00, and home by 9:00 or 9:30 if you get food.” He also encourages students to come watch games at home as well. “I think we’ll have students show up for different reasons. Some will be because they love Deshler and go crazy for Deshler. Some because it is new and they want to see what it is. Others because their friends show up.” Coach Reid added.

Conclusion

We encourage everyone in the Shoals to pick a game and go to it this season. Whether it is Florence, Deshler, or Muscle Shoals. Coach Reid does the same and noted how it is one of the fastest growing sports in the nation. It will be in the Olympics in two years as well. Colleges are adding it as well. So whether you are reading this from Brooks, Waterloo, Cherokee, Lauderdale County, etc., we encourage everyone to check out one game at least. Deshler will open their

season on the road at Florence Tuesday, September 1. Deshler's home opener will be Thursday, September 10 versus Muscle Shoals.

Zack Pounders,

Shoals Sports Report