

The First Flag Football Season: 2026

Florence 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.

Florence Preview

What is flag football? If you ask Florence, they will tell you “football without tackling.” From head coach Tiffany Pelle, assistant coach Bradley Elliott said, “basketball on grass/turf.” The players will say it's a fun new bonding experience.

Coach Tiffany Pelle thought she was retired from coaching 12 years ago, but she could not pass up the opportunity to work under new athletic director Myra Miles. “I had told everybody I was retired from coaching (outside of my kids).” Coach Pelle said. Everyone is excited to see what this can become around the school. Coach Elliott added that it can lead to more girls getting involved in sports. Assistant Coach Thomas Grant added how they can make history in a new way with flag football. Coach Pelle added that it has a low entry cost and there are very few barriers to entry. Whereas in other sports you may need a glove, bat, racket, etc.

New Athletic Director Myra Miles comes in with years of experience, and she has been around a school with a flag program when she was at Vestavia Hills. Middle School Assistant

Principal Derek Gober and former Athletic Director Byron Graham got the legwork done for the flag program to be declared as a sport for the coming school year.

With a new sport comes challenges and advantages. The players said some of the challenges are learning a new sport. While the coaches said some of the challenges come from having multisport athletes. Coach Pelle said, “It’s great (that they are involved in so much), but it has been a scheduling challenge because we are learning something new; we need all the time we can get.” Florence is allowing athletes to be involved in as much as possible, including having some Florence volleyball players are playing flag football.

The advantages come in the aspect of speed and athleticism. “There aren’t many other sports where you can come out here and make things work off pure athleticism.” Coach Pelle added. The other advantages come from having multisport athletes and being able to relate to the other sports when teaching flag football.

Multisport athletes can be a challenge to get them to be at all they need to be at in the summer, but Coach Pelle praised the other coaches at Florence for helping all summer. “We’ve all had to work together this summer to make it work,” she added. Florence’s flag team includes athletes from soccer, basketball, cheer, band, and more. Florence only has about four athletes on the team that only play flag football. Florence has some athletes who are three-sport or four-sport athletes. Kenzis Doxie does track, flag football, basketball, and volleyball. Joyden Ricks does basketball, flag football, and track. De’asha Reeder does flag football and softball. Florence hopes that next year will be easier to manage the summer with multisport athletes, but this being their first year, they did not know what to expect.

Flag football is played sometimes twice a week, so it is not like football where you play on a Friday and have all week to gameplan. However, that is not slowing Florence down. They will have HUDL accounts for all the girls to watch gamefilm as well as film from practice. They will also have time in the afternoons to be with the team and watch film before practice despite being on an eight period schedule. “That’s why everyone is excited about Coach Miles (new AD) is because she has made it a coach-positive place to work.” Coach Pelle added about having time in the afternoon. However, if you know any coach, you know they do not leave their job on the field. Coach Pelle and Coach Elliott will also spend time once they leave breaking film down.

Practice for flag will be similar to basketball, where you may only have one or two practices a week but could be playing twice a week as well. Coach Elliot noted how Florence practice will be more teaching and learning focused. Coach Pelle added how they will have a plan for roughly two hours. “I learned from coaching anything: if you have a plan that is efficient, it can be done in two hours.” Coach Pelle added.

Players have responded well so far despite never playing organized football. Kenzis Doxie said, “Everyone is still learning.” De’asha Reeder added, “Coaches are teaching us as we go.” Joyden Ricks added, “It’s all coming together with other sports examples being used.”

Legacy is one thing Florence flag football will be recognized for from the jump. Joyden Ricks is the daughter of Michael Ricks (two-time all-state), who played college ball at Alabama and was part of the first recruiting class for Nick Saban. They also have Karleigh Harris, daughter of football assistant coach Rodney “Boona” Harris. Then another one is Kiersten Hughes, daughter of multisport assistant coach Corey Hughes (2-time all-state basketball and one-time all-state football at Coffee High School). “After our first scrimmage, once Mike and Rodney saw Karleigh snapping the ball to Joyden, Rodney called me afterwards talking about how excited they were to see it.” Coach Pelle added. Assistant Coach Thomas Grant has coached youth league for 30+ years as well. Assistant Coach Elliot added how he looked up to Corey when Corey was in high school. “When Coach Pelle told me that was his (Corey) daughter, I knew she (Kiersten) was going to be an athlete right away,” he added

Florence flag football will have 27 players on the team. Making it the largest local team. The players will also play both ways (offense/defense), but hope they can learn who can do better on offense or defense as the season goes on. Florence has found a way to get all players in games in the summer playdates so far to see what they have.

Alabama is known for football, but Florence has plenty of athletes that their dad, uncles, brothers, etc. played. Joyden Ricks has been around football her whole life with her dad, Mike Ricks. De’asha Reeder’s brother played for Florence, Tavarius Reeder. Kenzis Doxie added that her dad played for Coach Thomas Grant and was a multisport athlete also. She joked, “he made me do this.” Despite never playing the game, it has not been too hard for the girls to learn the ins and outs of the game so far. Ricks added that she has always been around it. Doxie added how her dad has taken her to the sportsplex. Reeder has been in the yard with her dad working on it as well.

Florence’s coaches have already received help from UNA and NWSCC. Coach Pelle noted how Head Coach Abbi Munson at UNA was in a restaurant one day showing drills and how to do certain things. NWSCC signed a girl from Florence (Diamond Chandler) before Florence had a flag team.

Florence is unsure of what a game day will look like when it comes to admission, concessions, etc., but they already have a booster club for flag football that will be able to help. Florence will play home games at the high school campus on the turf field. The way the schedule works, they will not have to miss any class/instruction time for away games for students or coaches.

They have already seen support throughout a couple of summer playdates but are hoping the support continues into the season. Coach Pelle is hoping there will be an opportunity where students can get in free but is awaiting approval. The potential conflict with volleyball may only have one day that conflicts, where both are playing at the same time. The players want to see people continue to show up as the season progresses also. Coach Pelle noted how she has even had kids asking questions about it as well.

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. Florence will play the first flag football game by a Shoals team and the first flag football game in the Shoals. Florence will open their season on Thursday, August 20th at Westminster Christian. Florence will play their first home game a few days later on Monday, August 24th versus Tanner.

Zack Pounders,

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