

# **Southeast Michigan Youth Football Association**

## **SYMFA - Flag Football Rules**

### 1.1 PLAYER ELIGIBILITY

Age Requirement – Boys ages 6 and 7 as of May 1<sup>st</sup> of the current year (note: Athletes, who played prior to 2020 season would be grandfathered in).

### 1.2 TEAMS

Each team will consist of a maximum of 21 players assigned to a roster; seven players on a field. Players will be accepted on a first come/first serve basis with priority given to veterans and siblings of current SMYFA football/cheer members. Players will be assigned to teams using current SMYFA football boundaries.

### 1.3 SCHEDULE

- a) Number of Games – Games will be played in accordance with the schedule set by the SMYFA. Seven (7) games shall be scheduled if possible.
- b) Coaches – One coach must be on the field to huddle players on offense and defense. A different coach may be used for offense and defense but only one (1) or two (2) coaches for each team are allowed on the field at a time.

### 1.4 PRACTICE

- a) Practice Limits –Prior to the first game, no Team in a Unit shall practice more than three (3) days a week. The week following the first official game of the season, there shall be no more than two (2) days of practice per week. The days-off are up to the discretion of each Team in a Unit.
- b) During school nights, players are to practice no later than 8:00PM.

### 2.1 LEAGUE PURPOSE

This flag football program provides youngsters with the opportunity to learn the game and develop football skills at an early age. This league is intended to provide an introductory step to the SMYFA football league. As such, some rules have been modified to make the transition of conventional football as easy as possible for the players. The SMYFA Flag Football Program was created to teach and develop football skills, teamwork, sportsmanship, and have fun.

## 2.2 FIELD AND EQUIPMENT

- a) A regulation football field shall be used with markers each 20 yards.
- b) The game ball may be comprised of a composite material and shall be Wilson model Pee Wee K2 for GST Pee Wee ages 6-9
- c) Each team is responsible to provide their own game ball.
- d) Shoes – Official rubber molded shoes or tennis shoes may be worn.
- e) Jerseys – Team jersey will be worn.
- f) Mouthpieces are required and must be colored.
- g) Protective head gear must be worn by each player.
- h) All players must wear a protective cup.
- i) Soft elbow pads and soft knee pads are optional. Skateboarding type hard pads are not allowed.
- j) NO helmets or should pads are allowed.
- k) Flags cannot be looped or tied in order to prevent the opposing player from pulling off their flags.
- l) All teams will use the league approved flags. See example: Amazon “Champion Sports Triple Flag Football Set” ([link](#)).
- m) No player can play without 3 flags on their flag belt.
- n) All shirts must be tucked in.
- o) Players are allowed to wear football pants with knee pads inserted.

## 2.3 GAME RULES

- 1) Game Player Limit – Teams must begin and end game with 7 players on the field.
- 2) Required Playing Time.
  - a) Each player is required to start and finish a minimum of two full periods of each game without interruption except in the case of injury or illness or other emergency situations.
  - b) Prior to the flag game, teams must exchange standardized SMYFA lineup cards by period for each player that balances playing time (ie. no kid plays 4 quarters while one kid plays only 2 quarters) for the flag players.
    - (1) By the end of the game, each player must have played a minimum of 2 quarters.
  - c) Coaches must notify the opposing team of any players present who will not play due to illness, injury or other reason using the league approved spotter sheet.
  - d) A coach who has a player arrive after the start of the game but prior to the start of the third quarter must play him in two full periods of playing time. However, if a player arrives after the start of the 4<sup>th</sup> period, the coach has the option to play this player or not in the second half. If the tardy player is placed in the game at the beginning of the period, he cannot be replaced unless an injury occurs.
  - e) No player can play more than 2 periods per half.

## 2.4 PRACTICE ATTENDANCE

Any player missing one (1) practice during a game week (unexcused) may not participate in that week's game.

## 2.5 OFFICIALS

- a) The games will be administered by a minimum of 2 officials that work SMYFA games.
- b) Coaches are expected to help ensure fair play and sportsmanship.
- c) The home team shall provide an announcer and timekeeper.
- d) The goal of the officials should be to keep the game moving and call only penalties that impact the game or protect the players.
- e) Only the head coach can address the officials and the other coaches are not allowed to talk to the officials. Any coach that is riding the officials will be ejected from the game.

## 2.6 RULES OF PLAY

- 1) All games will consist of six periods, eight minutes each. The clock will stop only on change of possession, penalty or for injury. Clock stops when a TD is scored and starts again when the ball is snapped on ensuing change of possession.
- 2) There is a 40-second time limit between plays. The time limit is from the end of the last play to the beginning of the next play (snap of ball). The first infraction will result in a warning and after that will result in a 5-yard penalty.
- 3) Each team will be allowed 2 one-minute timeouts per half.
- 4) Three or four-point stances are allowed.
- 5) In the event a game must be suspended because of conditions which make it impossible to continue play, the unit directors shall declare it an official game if one complete half or more of the game has been played. If less than one-half of the game has been played, the game will be rescheduled from the start.
- 6) Time periods between periods and halves – There will be a one-minute period between each period and a 5-minute period between halves.
- 7) First Downs – A team makes a first down when the ball advances to or beyond the field designated 20-yard markers in 4 downs or less. If a defensive penalty occurs in the offensive's team red zone (20-yard line to the goal line), the infraction will result in penalty yardage and replay of the down (up to 5-yard line).
- 8) Defense must be ready/set as soon as the offense is ready to go. The defense cannot take their time setting up forcing the offense to wait until they are ready.
- 9) Scoring – After a touchdown, an extra point try may be permitted. Only passing and running attempts – no kicks. 1 point is awarded for a successful running attempts and 2 points are awarded for a successful passing (forward pass) PAT. J. PAT will be from the 5-yard line.
- 10) The football cannot be marked inside the 5-yard line. This is designed to preserve the 5-yard safety buffer at the line of scrimmage. If a player is downed inside the 5-yard line, the ball is moved back to the 5-yard line and the next down is played from there.
- 11) Kicking
  - a) Eliminate Flag kickoffs; the ball will be placed at the forty (40)-yard line [60-yard to score] to start each half and after each touchdown.
- 12) Punts
  - a) If a team wishes to punt on 4<sup>th</sup> down, they will notify the referee:
  - b) The ball will be placed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> 20-yard marker (for example if a putting from your own 25 the ball would be placed at the opponents 40-yard line).
  - c) The opponent will have 1<sup>st</sup> down at that point.
  - d) Any punt from inside the opponent's 40-yard line will be marked at the 20-yard line.

### 13) Fumbles

- (a) A fumble is dead at the point the ball touches the ground after coming in contact with offensive player and goes to the team who fumbles or dropped the ball. Exception: 4<sup>th</sup> down situations.
- (b) The ball cannot advance forward on a fumble.

### 14) Interceptions

Interceptions are allowed and may be advanced following an interception.

### 15) Blocking

- a) Players may use the open palm or forearm to block. Any use of other parts of the body to block is prohibited and a player shall be penalized. "Illegal Block"
- b) A player may not leave his feet to block. "Illegal Block"
- c) Blocking shall occur only in the area between the player's shoulders to his waist on the front of his body. A player who blocks below the waist (illegal block) trips another player (tripping), or blocks a player in the back (clipping) shall be penalized.
- d) If an offensive player legally engages a defender in a blocking position and that defender subsequently turns his back, the player is allowed to continue his block, even if it occurs in the back, until the defender breaks contact from the offensive blocker.
- e) The offensive player may protect the player with the ball by screening as done in basketball. Screening shall be defined as an offensive player maintaining a position between the defensive player and the player with the ball. No part of the screener's body, except their feet, may be in contact with the ground. Movement of the screener's body that causes contact with the defender is considered an illegal screen. The screener may not cause intentional contact with their elbows, forearms, hands, head, shoulders, or hips. **Incidental contact is unavoidable.** Whether stationary or not, all blocking violation are 10-yard penalties.
- f) Blocking is permitted within ten (10) yards of the line of scrimmage.

## 2.7 OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE RULES

- a) Offensive players can receive the ball from the center anywhere behind the line of scrimmage.
- b) All players are eligible to receive a pass.
- c) The set position for an interior lineman is hand on knees in a two-point or three-point stance. The set position for an uncovered lineman other than an interior lineman and/or all other players is either two-point stance or standing.
- d) The center cannot carry the ball from scrimmage but can receive a pass.
- e) The center may use a conventional snap, a shotgun snap or a side snap to put the ball in play.
- f) The ball carrier is down at the spot where the tackler pulls out one of the flags or when a knee touches the ground. In the event of a flag dropping without being pulled by a tackler, the ball is dead at the point the player is touched.
- g) Offensive Line – A minimum of 4 players must be on the line of scrimmage.
- h) Defensive Line – A minimum of 3 players must be on the line of scrimmage.

- i) Players may not interlock their legs at the line of scrimmage.
- j) The defense shall be in a “heads-up” position when lining across from an offensive interior lineman. No defensive player may line up over the center.
- k) The defense shall observe a 5-yard neutral zone from the spot of the ball. A player entering the neutral zone prior to the snap of the ball will result in an **Offside penalty: 5 yards.**

## 2.8 SPORTSMANSHIP

- a) This is a recreational league and all coaches must make every effort to avoid lopsided games. Coaches who run up the score over a weaker opponent may face disciplinary action by the football directors.
- b) After a team scores and is ahead by 18 points or more, the receiving team will start with the ball at the opponents 40-yard line.
- c) After a team scores and is ahead by 24 points or more, the receiving team will start with the ball at the opponents 20-yard line.
- d) A team who is ahead by 18 points or more is **EXPECTED** to place offensive skill players in line positions when on offense. This will allow other players to gain experience handling the ball and keep the game from being lopsided.
- e) If a team scores and is ahead by 24 or more points, the opposing team will start their next possession from the opponent’s 20-yard line. If the trailing team fails to score on that possession, they will retain possession and begin another drive on the opponent’s 20-yard line. An interception shall be considered dead at the spot of the interception and the ball goes back to the offense on a 1<sup>st</sup> down. Once the lead is less than 24 points, they may resume playing offense subject to the other sportsmanship rules listed above.
- f) Teams up by 18 points, or more, can only move/advance the ball by **PASSING** the ball from the 40-yard line to the end zone.
- g) A pitch pass (lateral) is not a forward pass.
- h) No ‘taking a knee’ in a flag football game. In flag football, a fumble that hits the ground is a dead ball, so it is considered unsportsmanlike to ‘take a knee’. Instead, teams are encouraged to allow an athlete who rarely carries the ball to be given an opportunity to run the ball. If a team takes a knee, the first offense will be a warning to the head flag coach. If it occurs again, the second offense (and further instances) will be a one game suspension.

## 2.9 PENALTIES

- a) The center shall be allowed sufficient time to snap the ball and assume a blocking position. Determination of “sufficient time” shall be at the discretion of the referee whose sole purpose is to protect the safety of the child centering the ball. To prevent neck injuries, centers attempting “shotgun snaps” shall be afforded a safe distance by the defender. A defensive player who fails to adhere to the official’s definition of “sufficient time” to allow the center to snap the ball and assume the blocking position shall be penalized **“Unsportsmanlike Conduct, Dunking the Center”**. **Penalty: 15 yards.**
- b) The ball carrier must run to avoid tacklers. Deliberate **charging of an opponent is 10 yards penalty**. Officials will use the same judgment on charging and blocking by offensive or defensive players as in basketball. Brushing contact and unavoidable contact is not willful charging.
- c) A ball carrier may NOT stiff arm a defender or protect his flags by deflecting the defender with the use of his hands. A ball carrier that impedes the legal attempt by the defender to de-flag him by protecting his flags with his hands shall be penalized for **“Flag Guarding”**. **Penalty: 10 yards.**
- d) No forceful charging or aggressive blocking or defensive BULL rushing by players is permitted. **Penalty: 10 yards.**
- e) If a defensive player tackles a ball carrier, **penalty is 10 yards** from the spot of the foul. If the runner was in the clear, and in the opinion of the referee would have scored except for being tackled, a touchdown shall be allowed.
- f) If a defensive player reaches across the body of the ball carrier to pull flag and contact is made which impedes the progress of the runner, the responsibility of the contact lies with the defensive players. **Penalty: 10 yards.**
- g) An offensive player in front of the ball carrier must stop or alter his run to avoid intentional contact with a defender. **Penalty: 10 yards.**
- h) Unnecessary roughness by tackler or elbowing by runner. **Penalty: 10 yards.**
- i) A player leaving his feet to go over an opposing player shall be penalized for “hurdling”. In the open field, game officials shall determine if the offensive player gained an unfair advantage by hurdling. **Penalty: 10 yards**
- j) Unsportsmanlike Conduct - **Penalty: 10 yards and/or ejection.**
- k) Pass Interference shall be enforced when it is considered flagrant and interferes with the opportunity for the receiver to catch the ball. **Penalty: 10 yards and an automatic 1<sup>st</sup> down.**
- l) A defensive player cannot push an offensive player/ball carrier out of bounds. **Penalty: 10 yards.**