

# FLAG FOOTBALL



**MODIFIED EVENTS**  
Individual Skills Competition

**TRADITIONAL EVENTS**  
Traditional Team

**UNIFIED EVENTS**  
Unified Team

The Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Flag Football shall govern all Special Olympics competitions. Special Olympics has created these rules based upon National Football League's *Air It Out Flag Football* rules, which shall be employed except when they are in conflict with the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Flag Football.

## RULES OF COMPETITION

### UNIFORM SPECIFICATIONS

1. All participants must have a playing uniform consisting of matching shirts with numbers on front and back which can be tucked in at the waist.
2. No jewelry may be worn (rings, bracelets, necklaces, earrings, etc.)
- 3. No blue jeans will be allowed.**
4. Players must wear rubber-cleated or flat-soled athletic shoes.
  - a. Metal cleats, spikes, hiking boots or other equipment deemed dangerous by officials will not be allowed.

### TEAMS & LEVELS

1. The team roster may contain a maximum of 12 players.
2. Teams shall field five (5) players to start the game (required).
  - a. Teams may continue with a minimum of four (4) players, if necessary due to disqualification or injury.
3. Team Level: Each team shall be placed in one (1) of three (3) Levels for play, based on attributes that best characterize their team. The level is subject to change by the Flag Football Sport Management Team prior to the tournament. A team's Level will serve as the basis for division placement.
  - a. 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.
  - b. 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.
  - c. Level 3 - Low: following rules is a challenge; low 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.
4. When Special Olympics athletes or Unified Sports® partners require the use of wheelchairs or other mobility assistance devices, participation in team sports (basketball, softball, volleyball, and flag football) likely creates undue health and safety risks for that athlete and others in the game. The County Coordinator may apply to the State Office for special consideration for athletes who require such assistance. These requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Athletes in question should not compete at any level without State Office approval.
- 5. The Head Coach of each Flag Football team MUST have been certified by attending a Special Olympics Flag Football Coaches Training School. If a program has more than one team, each team must have a separate certified coach.**

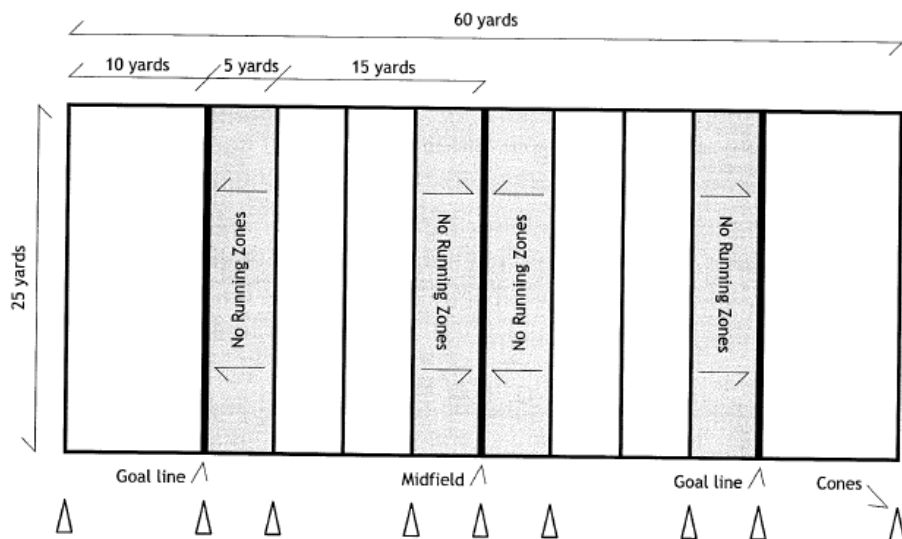
### GENERAL RULES

1. Special Olympics Flag Football is non-contact.
  - a. In all aspects of Special Olympics flag football, rulings shall be made with player safety as the primary consideration.
2. Teams will be grouped in divisions based on a classification round of games.
3. Points of Emphasis
  - a. No team shall repeatedly commit fouls which halve the distance to the goal line.
  - b. Neither team shall commit any act which, in the opinion of the referee, tends to make a travesty of the game. This includes intentionally committing fouls to gain an advantage.
  - c. The referee will enforce any penalty they consider equitable, including the award of a score for an unfair act.
4. Scoring
  - a. Touchdown: six (6) points.
  - b. Extra Point: one (1) point from the 5-yard line, two (2) points from the 10-yard line.
  - c. Safety: two (2) points.



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5. Timing
  - a. The game shall consist of two (2) 20-minute halves (running time).
  - b. Officials can stop the clock at their discretion (injuries, delays).
  - c. Each team receives one (1) 60-second timeout per half.
    - i. An unused timeout in the first half does not carry over to the second half.
  - a. There shall be a 5-minute break at halftime.
6. Coin Toss
  - a. A coin toss determines first possession.
  - b. Each team will provide two (2) captains.
  - c. The officials and team captains will meet three (3) minutes prior to the start of the contest to conduct the coin toss.
  - d. The winner of the coin toss will choose offense, defense, or end of field to defend. The team winning the coin toss may defer its choice to the second half.
7. Possessions
  - a. All possessions, except following an interception, start at the offensive team's 5-yard line.
  - b. The offense has four (4) plays to cross mid-field.
  - c. Once the offense crosses mid-field, they have four (4) 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 team starts at their 5-yard line.
  - e. Interceptions change possession of the ball at the spot of the interception.
    - i. A ball intercepted in the end zone is spotted at the 5-yard line.
  - f. Each time the ball is spotted (marked ready for play by the official) the team has 30-seconds to snap the ball.
8. Positions/Snap
  - a. The ball must be snapped between the legs to start each play.
  - b. No minimum number of players is required to line-up on the line of scrimmage.
9. Rushing the Quarterback (QB)
  - a. All players who rush the Quarterback must be a minimum of 7-yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.
    - i. A special marker, placed by the official, will designate the spot 5-yards from the line of scrimmage.
  - a. Players not rushing the quarterback may defend the line of scrimmage.
  - b. Once the Quarterback hands off the ball, the 7-yard zone no longer exists, and all defenders are eligible to rush.
10. Running
  - a. The Quarterback (player receiving the snap) CANNOT run the ball.
  - b. Only direct hand-offs behind the line of scrimmage are legal. Laterals or pitches of any kind are not allowed.
  - c. The player who takes a hand-off can pass the ball, as long as they do not pass the line of scrimmage.
  - d. "No Running Zones" are located 5-yards before the mid-field line and goal line.
    - i. Any ball snapped from these zones must be passed.
    - ii. The purpose of "No Running Zones" is to avoid short yardage power running situations.
  - e. The ball carrier may not spin, dive, hurdle, or use either arm to shield a defender from grasping their flag.
  - f. The ball is spotted where the ball carrier's belt is when the flag is pulled.



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11. Passing and Receiving
  - a. All passes must be forward and received beyond the line of scrimmage.
  - b. All players are eligible to receive a forward pass, including the Quarterback, if they have legally handed-off.
    - i. Exception: In Unified Sports® divisions, if a Unified partner throws a pass, only athletes are eligible receivers.
  - c. Only one (1) player is allowed in motion at the snap and they may not be moving toward the line of scrimmage at the snap.
  - d. A player must have at least one (1) foot in bounds when making a catch.
  - e. Interceptions change possession of the ball at the point of the interception.
    - i. Exception: A ball intercepted in the end zone is spotted at the 5-yard line.
12. Dead Balls/Fumbles
  - a. There are no fumbles. The ball is spotted where it hits the ground.
  - b. Play is ruled dead when:
    - i. The ball carrier's flag is pulled;
    - ii. The ball carrier loses their flag;
    - iii. The ball carrier steps out of bounds;
    - iv. The ball carrier's knee or hand touches the ground;
    - v. A touchdown, extra point, or safety is scored;
    - vi. When during a try-for-point the defense obtains possession of the ball;
    - vii. When a forward pass strikes the ground or is caught simultaneously by opposing players (the offense retains possession);
    - viii. A pass is intercepted (no returns);
    - ix. A receiver catches a ball without their flags attached;
    - x. A snapped ball touches the ground; or
    - xi. When there is an inadvertent whistle.
13. Penalties
  - a. All penalties are assessed from the line of scrimmage.
  - b. No penalty may take the ball more than half the distance to the offender's goal line.
  - c. All penalties are automatically accepted (no declination).
  - d. Sportsmanship/Roughing
    - i. The officials will disqualify any player who participates in rough or unsportsmanlike play.
    - ii. No warning is required.
  - e. Offense: 10-yards from the line of scrimmage and loss of down
    - i. Illegal Motion (more than 1 player moving at snap, moving forward at snap);
    - ii. Offside (in neutral zone at snap, false start);
    - iii. Illegal forward pass (not beyond line of scrimmage; Unified partner to Unified partner);
    - iv. Pass Interference (picking or pushing defender);
    - v. Illegal Contact (holding, blocking, bumping);
    - vi. Flag Guarding (driving, spinning, warding off); and
    - vii. Delay of Game (failing to snap within 30 second of ready).
  - f. Defense: 10-yards from the line of scrimmage and automatic first down
    - i. Offside (in or beyond neutral zone at snap);
    - ii. Pass Interference;
    - iii. Illegal Contact (holding, blocking, bumping);
    - iv. Illegal Flag Pull (before receiver has ball); and
    - v. Illegal Rushing (rushing Quarterback inside 5-yard line).
14. Overtime
  - a. If the score is tied at the end of regulation play:
    - i. A coin toss is held to determine first possession.
    - ii. Each team receives one (1) play from its own 5-yard line.
    - iii. The team with a yardage advantage is awarded one (1) extra point and wins the game.
      - 1) If both teams score a touchdown, or gain the same yardage, the procedure is repeated until one (1) team wins.



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## SUPPLEMENT TO THE RULES

1. Delay of Game
  - a. The ball must be put in play promptly and legally and any action or lack of action by either team that tends to prevent this is considered a delay of game.
  - b. This includes:
    - i. Interrupting the 30-second count for any reason except for a granted timeout,
    - ii. Consuming more than 30-seconds to snap the ball after it is ready for play,
    - iii. Failing to remove an injured player for whose benefit an excess timeout has been granted, or
    - iv. Deliberately advancing the ball after it has been declared dead.
2. Diving
  - a. A defensive or offensive player may dive to catch a pass.
  - b. Diving is illegal when used to down a player or advance a ball.
  - c. A player cannot dive in an attempt to gain extra yardage.
  - d. The team will be penalized accordingly.
3. Eligible Receiver
  - a. All offensive players are eligible to receive a pass, except in Unified Sports® divisions where Unified partners are ineligible when Unified partners are throwing the pass.
    - i. Unified Sports® teams are expected to comply with this rule without intervention by officials.
  - b. Failure to “self-patrol” will be considered unsportsmanlike, and will be penalized accordingly.
4. False Start
  - a. No member of the offensive team may simulate the start of the play before the ball is snapped.
5. Handling the Ball
  - a. Handling the ball is transferring player possession from one (1) teammate to another without throwing or kicking it.
  - b. A ball carrier may directly hand the ball to another player, provided both players are behind the line of scrimmage.
6. Hurdling
  - a. Jumping over or attempting to jump over a player, by the ball carrier, to prevent from being downed or to gain additional yardage is illegal.
    - i. Note: Jumping over a player who is on the ground to avoid injury, by official’s judgment, is legal.
7. Inadvertent Whistle
  - a. In case of an inadvertent whistle the team in possession of the ball may choose to accept the result of the play at the point where the play was blown dead or choose to re-play the down.
8. Line of Scrimmage
  - a. The line of scrimmage for each team is a vertical plane through the point of the ball nearest the team’s goal line.
  - b. Each player on a team must be on its side of the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.
9. Motion
  - a. Only one (1) player of the offensive team may be in motion at the snap.
    - i. This player must be behind the Quarterback and not moving toward its goal line at the time the ball is snapped.
    - ii. If the player comes to a stop they must be set for one (1) second.
10. Screen Blocking
  - a. Legally obstructing an opponent without contacting him/her with any part of the screen blocker’s body.
  - b. The screen blocker shall have their arms fully extended to the ground (below the waist) either at their side, in front, or behind their back.
  - c. Any use of arms, elbows, or legs to initiate contact during the screen block is illegal.
  - d. A player must be on their feet before, during, and after screen blocking.
  - e. Screen blocking is the only form of legal blocking that can be used by any player at any time.
  - f. If any of the provisions listed are violated, and contact results, the screener has committed an illegal block.
    - i. The screen blocker must give an opponent at least one (1) step.
    - ii. The screen blocker must not initiate contact with opponent.
    - iii. 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.
    - iv. After the snap of the ball, the blocker may move laterally or backward two (2) steps.

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11. Shielding (Flag Guarding)
  - a. Runners shall not flag guard by using their hands, arms, or the ball to deny the opportunity for an opponent to pull or remove their flag belt.
  - b. This includes:
    - i. Swinging the hand or arm over the flag belt;
    - ii. Placing the ball in a possession over the flag belt; and
    - iii. Lowering the shoulders or arm over the flag belt.
12. Shift
  - a. A shift is the action of one (1) or more offensive players who after taking set positions move to a new position prior to the snap.
  - b. A player who shifts must reset for one (1) second prior to the snap.
13. Snap
  - a. A snap is the legal act of passing the ball through the legs from the ground to the Quarterback to start a play.
14. Substitutions
  - a. Any player on the roster may enter upon the completion of a play (when the ball is dead).
  - b. Each substitute must play at least one (1) down prior to being replaced.
  - c. A replaced player must leave the field immediately.

## EQUIPMENT

1. An intermediate (youth) size football will be used in all divisions.
2. A protective mouthpiece must be worn at all times.
3. A one-piece, three-flag belt will be worn during the game.

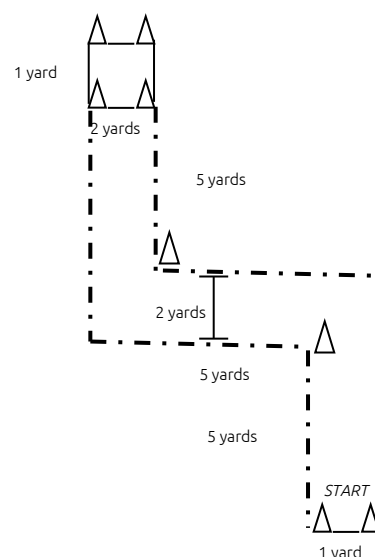
## STANDARD RULES FOR UNIFIED SPORTS® TEAM

1. The roster shall contain a proportionate number of athletes and Unified partners.
2. During competition, the line-up shall never exceed three (3) athletes and two (2) Unified partners at any time.
3. Failure to adhere to the required ratio results in a forfeit.
4. Each team shall have an adult non-playing coach responsible for the line-up and conduct of the team during competition.

## STANDARD RULES FOR INDIVIDUAL SKILLS COMPETITION

1. The Individual Skills Competition is a competition designed for lower ability athletes.
2. It is not for athletes who can already play the game.
3. The Individual Skills Competition is composed of four (4) events: Catching, Throwing for Accuracy, Throwing for Distance, and Flag Pulling.
4. The athlete's final score is determined by adding together the scores from these four (4) events.
5. The field size is 20-yards x 20-yards.
6. Catching
  - a. Purpose
    - i. To measure the athlete's ability to run a route and catch a football.
  - b. Equipment
    - i. Eight (8) traffic cones and two (2) footballs
  - c. Description
    - i. The athlete will run a chair route marked by cones.
    - ii. Each athlete starts at the starting point marked by two (2) cones then run to the first cone placed five (5) yards out, turn left and run five (5) additional yards to the next cone, then turn right, and run five (5) more yards to the square of cones and end up in a box 1-yard x 1-yard; the athlete will turn around and catch a thrown football.
    - iii. Each athlete will complete the whole activity three (3) times.
  - d. Scoring
    - i. The athlete receives five (5) points for catching the ball; two (2) points for blocking or touching (knocking down the ball); zero (0) points for a missed attempt.
    - ii. For each cone on the running route the athlete successfully runs they will receive one (1) point.
    - iii. A total of 21 points are possible at this station (7 points total per attempt).

**Catching Diagram**



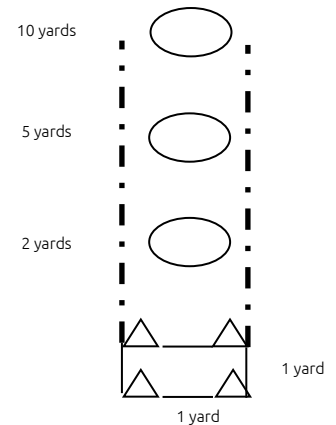


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## 7. Throwing for Accuracy

- a. Purpose
  - i. To measure the athlete's ability to throw a football accurately.
- b. Equipment
  - i. Two (2) traffic cones, three (3) Hoola Hoops, five (5) footballs
- c. Description
  - i. The player stands behind the restraining line in a 1-yard x 1-yard box, entering and existing from the back of the box.
  - ii. Three (3) targets are placed strategically on field; one (1) hoop at 2-yards, 5-yards, and 10-yards away from the restraining line.
  - iii. The athlete will stand in the square and try to throw the football into any of the targets (hoola hoops).
  - iv. Each athlete receives three (3) trials, one (1) trial at each distance. There are five (5) attempts per trial, for a maximum of 30 points possible.
- d. Scoring
  - i. Each target has its own point value.
    - 1) The 10-yard target is worth three (3) points.
    - 2) The 5-yard target is worth two (2) points.
    - 3) The 2-yard target is worth one (1) point.
    - 4) Zero (0) points for missing target.

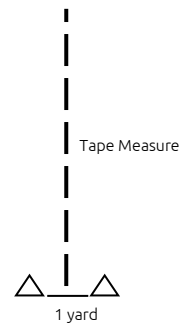
**Throwing for Accuracy Diagram**



## 8. Throwing for Distance

- a. Purpose
  - i. To measure the athlete's ability in throwing a football for distance.
- b. Equipment
  - i. Two (2) traffic cones, five (5) footballs, long measuring tape
- c. Description
  - i. The player stands behind the restraining line, back far enough to take one (1) or more steps in preparation for throwing.
  - ii. The player has five (5) attempts to throw the football as far as possible, without stepping over the restraining line.
  - iii. Coaches, assistants or other waiting players should be positioned in the field to indicate, using a cone or marking stake, the spot where each ball first touches the ground.
  - iv. The best of five (5) throws is measured and recorded as the player's score.
  - v. If a player steps on or over the line before releasing the football, the attempt must be repeated.
  - vi. There will be a maximum of two (2) repeats.
- d. Scoring
  - i. The net throwing score equals the throwing distance measured at the point the ball hits the ground.
  - ii. The player's score is the best of the five (5) throws.

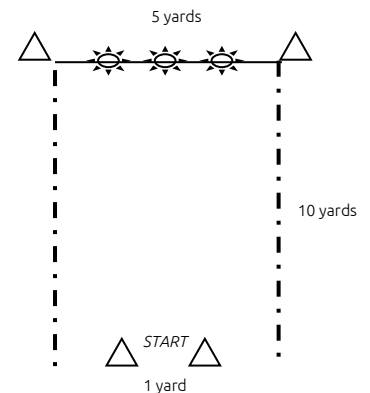
**Throwing for Distance Diagram**



## 9. Flag Pulling

- a. Purpose
  - i. To measure the athlete's flag pulling ability.
- b. Equipment
  - i. Eight (8) traffic cones, three (3) flag belts with flags, one (1) stopwatch and three (3) volunteers
- c. Description
  - i. There will be three (3) volunteers with flags on, standing 10-yards from the starting line marked by cones.
  - ii. The athlete will run out and pull a flag off the first volunteer, then will return to the starting line and drop the flag in box.
  - iii. The athlete will repeat this two (2) more times until all flags are pulled and dropped in the box at the starting line.
- d. Scoring
  - i. This event will be scored by time. Listed below is the score being used.

**Flag Pulling Diagram**



**Conversion Chart**

10 - 15 seconds	20 points
16 - 20 seconds	18 points
21 - 25 seconds	16 points
26 - 30 seconds	14 points
31 - 35 seconds	12 points
36 - 40 seconds	10 points
41 - 45 seconds	8 points
46 - 50 seconds	6 points
51 - 55 seconds	4 points
56 and up	2 points