



**2026**

**ELK RIVER**

**FLAG FOOTBALL**

**RULES**

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# GAME

1. At the start of each game, captains from both teams meet at midfield for the coin toss to determine who starts with the ball. The visiting team calls the toss.

2. The winner of the coin toss has the choice of offense or defense. The loser of the coin toss has the choice of direction. Possession changes to start the second half to the team that started the game on defense.

3. The offensive team takes possession of the ball at its 5-yard line and has four (4) downs to cross midfield. Once a team crosses midfield, it has three (3) downs to score a touchdown.

a. If the offensive team fails to cross midfield, on 3 downs, and elect to "punt" on 4th down, possession of the ball changes and the opposition starts its drive from its own 5-yard line. If the offensive team goes for it on 4th down and does not cross field, the opposing team will start its possession from the spot.

b. Offensive Teams MUST declare 4th down intent; "Play or Punt", when asked by the referee and prior to the 'Ready for Play'.

c. Teams may use a timeout only to change the declaration of "Play" at any time prior to the expiration of the play clock.

d. If the declaration is "Punt" the ball changes possession and will be placed at the opposing Team's 5-yard line, 1st down, with NO option to change the declaration.

e. If the offense fails to score, after crossing midfield the ball changes possession and the new offensive Team starts at its 5-yard line

4. Teams change sides after the first half. Possession changes to the team that started the game on defense.

# TERMINOLOGY

<b>Boundary Lines</b>	The outer perimeter lines around the field. They include the sidelines and back of the end zone lines.
<b>Line of Scrimmage (LOS)</b>	an imaginary line running through the point of the football and across the width of the field.
<b>Line-to-Gain</b>	The line the offense must pass to get a first down or score.
<b>Rush Line</b>	An imaginary line running across the width of the field seven yards (into the defensive side) from the line of scrimmage.
<b>Offense</b>	The team with possession of the ball.
<b>Defense</b>	The team opposing the offense to prevent it from advancing the ball.
<b>Passer</b>	The offensive player that throws the ball and may or may not be the quarterback.
<b>Rusher</b>	The defensive player assigned to rush the quarterback to prevent him/ her from passing the ball by pulling his/her flags or by blocking the pass.
<b>Live Ball</b>	Refers to the period of time that the play is in action. Generally used in regard to penalties. Live ball penalties are considered part of the play and must be enforced before the down is considered complete.
<b>Dead Ball</b>	Refers to the period of time immediately before or after a play.
<b>Whistle</b>	Sound made by an official using a whistle that signifies the end of the play or a stop in the action for a timeout, halftime or the end of the game.
<b>Inadvertent Whistle</b>	Official's whistle that is performed in error.
<b>Charging</b>	An illegal movement of the ball-carrier directly at a defensive player who has established position on the field. This includes lowering the head or initiating contact with a shoulder, forearm or the chest.
<b>Flag Guarding</b>	An illegal 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, arm or ball.
<b>Shovel Pass</b>	A legal forward pass across the LOS underhand, backhand or by pushing the ball forward.
<b>Lateral</b>	A backward or sideway toss of the ball by the ball-carrier.
<b>Unsportsmanlike Conduct</b>	A rude, confrontational or offensive behavior or language.

# EQUIPMENT

1. Players must wear shoes or cleats. Cleats with exposed metal are never allowed and must be removed.
2. Players may tape their forearms, hands and fingers. Players may wear gloves, elbow pads and knee pads. Braces with exposed metals are not allowed.
3. Players must remove all jewelry. Winter beanies are allowed.
4. Players may wear soft shell helmets and sunglasses but they must be secured at ALL times while on the field.
5. Players' jerseys must be tucked into shorts or pants if they hang below the belt line.
6. NFL Flag footballs will be provided

# FIELD

1. No Run zones are located five yards prior to midfield and five yards prior to the endzone in the offense's direction.
2. No-run zones are in place to prevent teams from conducting power run plays. While in the no-run zones (a 5-yard imaginary zone before midfield and before the end zone), teams cannot run the ball in any fashion. All plays must be pass plays, even with a handoff.
3. Stepping on the boundary line is considered out of bounds.
4. Each offensive team approaches only TWO no-run zones in each drive (one zone 5 yards from midfield to gain the first down, and one zone 5 yards from the goal line to score a TD).

# **TIMING AND OVERTIME**

1. Games are played on a 40-minute continuous clock with two 20-minute halves. The clock stops for halftime, injuries and the Officials' discretion.
2. Halftime is 5 minutes.
3. Each time the ball is spotted, a team has 40 seconds to snap the ball.
4. Each team has two 60-second timeouts per half. They do not carry over.
5. Officials can stop the clock at their discretion.
6. In the event of an injury, the clock will stop then restart when the injured player is removed from the field of play.
7. If the score is tied at the end of regulation play, an overtime period will be used to determine a winner. Overtime format, when applicable, is as follows: .
  - a. Home team calls the toss to determine the team that chooses to be on offense or defense first.
  - b. Both teams get one play from the 10-yard line. If teams score they must go for two
  - c. If still tied after the overtime , the contedt will be declared a tie.

## **SCORING**

1. Touchdown: 6 points 2. PAT (point after touchdown) 1 point (5-yard line) or 2 points (10-yard line)
2. A team that scores a touchdown must declare whether it wishes to attempt a 1-point conversion (from the 5-yard line) or a 2-point conversion (from the 10-yard line). Any change, once a decision is made to try for the extra point, requires a charged timeout. A decision cannot be changed after a penalty.

## **COACHES**

Coaches are expected to adhere to Elk River Flag philosophies, coaching guidelines and code of conduct.

# LIVE BALL/DEAD BALL

1. The ball is live at the snap of the ball and remains live until the official whistles the ball dead.
2. A player who gains possession of the ball in the air is considered in bounds as long as the first foot or a body part other than the hand contacts the ground in the field of play with possession.
3. The defense may not mimic the offensive team signals by trying to confuse the offensive players, while the quarterback is calling out signals to start the play. This will result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty.
4. Substitutions may be made on any dead ball.
5. Any official can whistle the play dead.
6. Play is ruled “dead” when:
  - a. The ball hits the ground.
  - b. The ball-carrier’s flag is pulled.
  - c. The ball-carrier steps out of bounds.
  - d. A touchdown, PAT or safety is scored.
  - e. The ball-carrier’s knee or arm hits the ground.
  - f. The ball-carrier’s flag falls out.
  - g. The receiver catches the ball while in possession of one or no flag(s).
  - h. The 7 second pass clock expires..
  - i. If the ball hits the ground as a result of a bad snap, the ball is placed where the ball hit the ground.
7. If inadvertent whistle occurs the offense has two options:
  - A) take the ball where the whistle blew and the down is consumed
  - B) replay the down from the original line of scrimmage. If it occurs on the last play of the half or game, the offense will be awarded one untimed down and given those two options.
8. Officials should all agree in order to change a call on the field that is in dispute

# RUNNING

1. The ball is spotted where the ball is when the flag is pulled.
2. The quarterback cannot directly run with the ball. The quarterback is the offensive player who receives the snap.
3. Only direct handoffs behind the line of scrimmage are permitted. Handoffs may be in front, behind or to the side of the offensive player but must be behind the line of scrimmage. The offense may use multiple handoffs. a. "Center sneak" play is no longer allowed. The QB is not allowed to handoff to the center on the first handoff of the play.
4. Definition of a "Legal Handoff" - Total loss of possession directly from 1 offensive player to another.
5. Absolutely NO pitches or laterals of any kind.
6. No-run Zones are located 5 yards before each end zone and 5 yards on either side of midfield are designed to avoid short-yardage power-running situations. Teams are not allowed to run in these zones if the subsequent line is LIVE. (Reminder: Each offensive team approaches only TWO no-run zones in each drive – one 5 yards from midfield to gain the first down and one 5 yards from the goal line to score a TD)
7. Runners are not permitted to dive or hurdle any player while advancing the ball.
8. Ballcarriers may leave their feet and the play will continue for spinning, jump cuts, QB's passing progression or if there is a clear indication that he/she has done so to avoid a collision with another player and the play will continue without stoppage. However, if while leaving the ground, contact is made unnecessary roughness penalty may be enforced by the official.
9. No blocking or "screening" is allowed at any time.
10. Offensive players in close proximity of the ball-carrier must stop their motion once the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage. No running with the ball-carrier.
11. Flag obstruction – All jerseys MUST be tucked in before play begins. The flags must be on the player's hips and free from obstruction. Deliberately obstructed flags will be considered flag guarding.
  - b. Any player who receives a handoff can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage.
  - c. Once the ball has been handed off, in front, behind or to the side of the quarterback, the seven-second passing clock is eliminated and all defensive players are eligible to rush.

# PASSING

1. All passes must be thrown with one hand from behind the line of scrimmage, thrown forward and ball out of hand prior to breaching the line of scrimmage.
  - a. There is no intentional grounding
  - b. All passes that do not cross the line of scrimmage, whether received or not, are illegal forward passes, unless touched by a defender.
  - c. The quarterback may throw the ball away to avoid a sack. Pass must go beyond the line of scrimmage.
2. Shovel passes are allowed but must be received beyond the line of scrimmage.
3. The quarterback has a seven-second "pass clock." If a pass is not thrown within the seven seconds, the play is dead, the down is consumed and the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage. Once the ball is handed off, the 7-second rule is no longer in effect.
  - a. If the QB is standing in the end zone at the end of the 7-second clock, the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage (LOS).

# RECEIVING

1. All players are eligible to receive passes (including the quarterback if the ball has been handed off behind the line of scrimmage).
2. Only one player is allowed in motion at a time. All motion must be lateral to the line of scrimmage and no motion is permitted toward the line of scrimmage.
3. A player must have at least one foot or other body part in bounds, contacting the ground first with possession.
4. In the case of simultaneous possession by both an offensive and defensive player, possession is awarded to the offense.
5. Interceptions are returnable. If returned for a score during regular game play, the score will be worth six points, two points if returned during conversions and/or overtime. b. If the quarterback throws the ball and then catches it, the play is dead and treated like an incomplete pass

# **RUSHING THE PASSER**

1. All players who rush the passer must be a minimum of seven yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped. One player can rush the quarterback. Players not rushing the quarterback can defend on the line of scrimmage. Pre K, K, 1st thru 3rd Grade Divisions: Defenders may not rush the passer unless agreed to by both head coaches prior to game start.
2. Once the ball is handed off, the seven-yard rule no longer is in effect and all defenders may go behind the line of scrimmage.
3. A referee will designate a rush line seven yards from the line of scrimmage. Defensive players should verify they are in the correct position with the official on every play.
4. Players rushing the quarterback may attempt to block a pass; however, contact to the QB, unless ruled incidental by the official, would result in a roughing the passer penalty.
5. The offense cannot impede the rusher in any way. The rusher has the right to a clear path to the quarterback, regardless of where they line up prior to the snap. If the offensive player does not move after the snap, then it is the rusher's responsibility to go around the offensive player and to avoid contact.
6. A sack occurs if the quarterback's flags are pulled behind the line of scrimmage. The ball will be spotted where possession of the ball is once the flag is pulled.

# FLAG PULLING

1. A legal flag pull takes place when the ball-carrier is in full possession of the ball.
2. Defenders can dive to pull flags but cannot tackle, hold or run through the ball-carrier when pulling flags.
3. It is illegal to attempt to strip or pull the ball from the ball-carrier's possession at any time.
4. If a player's flag inadvertently falls off during a play while that player has possession, the player is down immediately and the play ends. The ball is placed where the flag lands.
5. If a player who has one or no flags in their belt takes possession of the ball, the play is dead at that spot on the field
6. A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags off of a player who is not in possession of the ball.
7. Flag guarding is an attempt by the ball-carrier to obstruct the defender's access to the flags by stiff arming, dropping the head, hand, ball, arm or shoulder or intentionally covering the flags with the

# FORMATIONS

1. Offenses must have a minimum of one player on the line of scrimmage (the center) and up to four players on the line of scrimmage. The quarterback must be off the line of scrimmage.
  - a. Teams may shift formations prior to the snap as long as they are set for at least 1 second before the ball is snapped.
  - b. One player at a time may go in motion at least 1 yard behind the line of scrimmage.
2. Movement by a player who is set or a player who runs toward the line of scrimmage while in motion is considered a false start.
3. The center must snap the ball with a rapid and continuous motion between his/her legs to a player in the backfield, and the ball must completely leave his/her hands.

# UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT

1. If the referee witnesses any acts of intentional tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, blocking or any unsportsmanlike act, the game will be stopped and the player will be ejected from the game. The decision is made at the referee's discretion. No appeals will be considered. FOUL PLAY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED!
2. Offensive or confrontational language is NOT allowed. Officials have the right to determine offensive language. If offensive or confrontational language occurs, the officials will determine if a warning or immediate ejection is warranted.
3. Players may not physically or verbally abuse any opponent, coach or official.
4. Defenders must give free releases off the line of scrimmage to offensive players and are not allowed to run through the ball-carrier when pulling flags. ROUGH PLAY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED
5. Fans must also adhere to good sportsmanship as well:
  - a. Yell to cheer on your players, not to harass officials or other teams.
  - b. Keep comments clean and profanity free.
  - c. Compliment ALL players, not just one child or team.
6. Fans are required to keep fields safe and kids friendly and adhere to league requirements for seating:
  - a. Keep younger kids and equipment such as coolers, chairs and tents a minimum of 10 yards off the field in the end zone area.
  - b. Stay in the end zone area, not between fields.
  - c. Dispose of ALL trash in designated trash cans.

# PENALTIES

## General

1. The referee will call all penalties.
2. Only the head coach may ask the referee questions about rule clarification and interpretations. Players may not question calls.
3. Games or halves may not end on a defensive penalty unless the offense declines it
4. Penalties are assessed live ball then dead ball. Live ball penalties must be assessed before play is considered complete.
5. Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal yardage when the penalty yardage is more than half the distance to the goal.

## Penalties:

- Defensive unnecessary roughness +10 yards and automatic first down
- Defensive unsportsmanlike conduct +10 yards and automatic first down
- Illegal rush (Starting rush from inside 7-yard marker) +5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
- Illegal flag pull (Before the receiver has the ball) +5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
- Roughing the passer +5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
- Taunting +5 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
- Offensive unnecessary roughness -10 yards and loss of down
- Offensive unsportsmanlike conduct -10 yards and loss of down
- Illegal forward pass (Any pass received or lands behind the line of scrimmage or throwing a pass after crossing the line of scrimmage) -5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
- Offensive pass interference -5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
- Illegal motion (More than one person moving) -5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
- Delay of game -5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
- Impeding the rusher -5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
- Illegal Procedure -5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down.
- Defensive pass interference Automatic first down
- Holding +5 yards and automatic first down
- Stripping +5 yards and automatic first down
- Screening or blocking -5 yards and loss of down
- Charging -5 yards and loss of down
- Flag guarding -5 yards and loss of down

# **GRADE BASED GUIDELINES**

These are Elk River Flag recommended adjustments to the rules to assist with teaching the game in the younger age groups, specially the Pre K, K, 1st, 2nd & 3rd Grade divisions. 'No Run' zones are eliminated. Teams may run anywhere on the field. Coaches for each team are permitted on the field to help their players.

Pre K, & K divisions, if the ball falls to, or touches the ground during the initial center to quarterback exchange, the play is ruled a 'Do Over' with no loss of down, once per down. On a second consecutive occurrence, the down is consumed.