



Special Olympics
Unified Sports®



SPECIAL OLYMPICS DELAWARE

Unified Flag Football Rules

DIAA regulations govern all Unified Sports. The official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Flag Football shall govern all Special Olympics competitions. Special Olympics has created these rules based upon the 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.

Unified Flag Football is a non-contact sport. In all aspects of Unified Flag Football, rulings shall be made with player safety as the primary consideration.

UNIFORMS

- 1) All participants must have a playing uniform consisting of matching shirts with numbers on front and back, which **MUST** be tucked in at the waist.
- 2) **All exposed undergarments must be solid black, white or team color**
- 3) Shirts with hoods **must be tucked in** and **pants/shorts with pockets are not allowed**.
- 4) No jewelry may be worn (rings, bracelets, necklaces, earrings, etc.)
- 5) No blue jeans will be allowed.
- 6) 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.
- 7) An excess belt hanging out from flag belt must be tucked in at all times.
***Players in violation of any uniform requirements must leave game until corrected.**

EQUIPMENT

- 1) An intermediate (youth) size football will be used in all divisions.
- 2) A protective mouthpiece must be worn at all times.
- 3) An affixed flag belt with removable flags that are located on each hip will be worn during the game. The flags should be free flowing and easily accessible for a defender to see and grab. **Flags need to be contrasting color from pants/shorts.**

ROSTERS

- 1) Each team shall have an adult non-playing coach responsible for the line-up and conduct of the team during competition.
- 2) DIAA Eligibility Rosters are due the **first day of Unified Flag Football competition**.
- 3) **Game Day Rosters** shall contain a proportionate number of athletes and Unified partners. The roster must contain a minimum of **5 (3 athletes and 2 Unified partners)** and a maximum of **15 (9 athletes and 6 Unified partners)** players.
 - a) Prior to the start of each game the coach is responsible for identifying the players eligible for that game on a roster card and for providing one (1) copy of the roster card to the officials and one (1) copy to the opposing coach. (See Sample Card on page 9.)
- 4) Teams are required to have five players (3 athletes and 2 Unified partners) to start the game.
- 5) The line-up shall never exceed three (3) athletes and two (2) partners at any time.
 - a) Teams may continue with a minimum of four (4) players (minus one partner or athlete) due to disqualification or injury. Playing with 3 or fewer, or with 4 athletes only, is an automatic forfeit.



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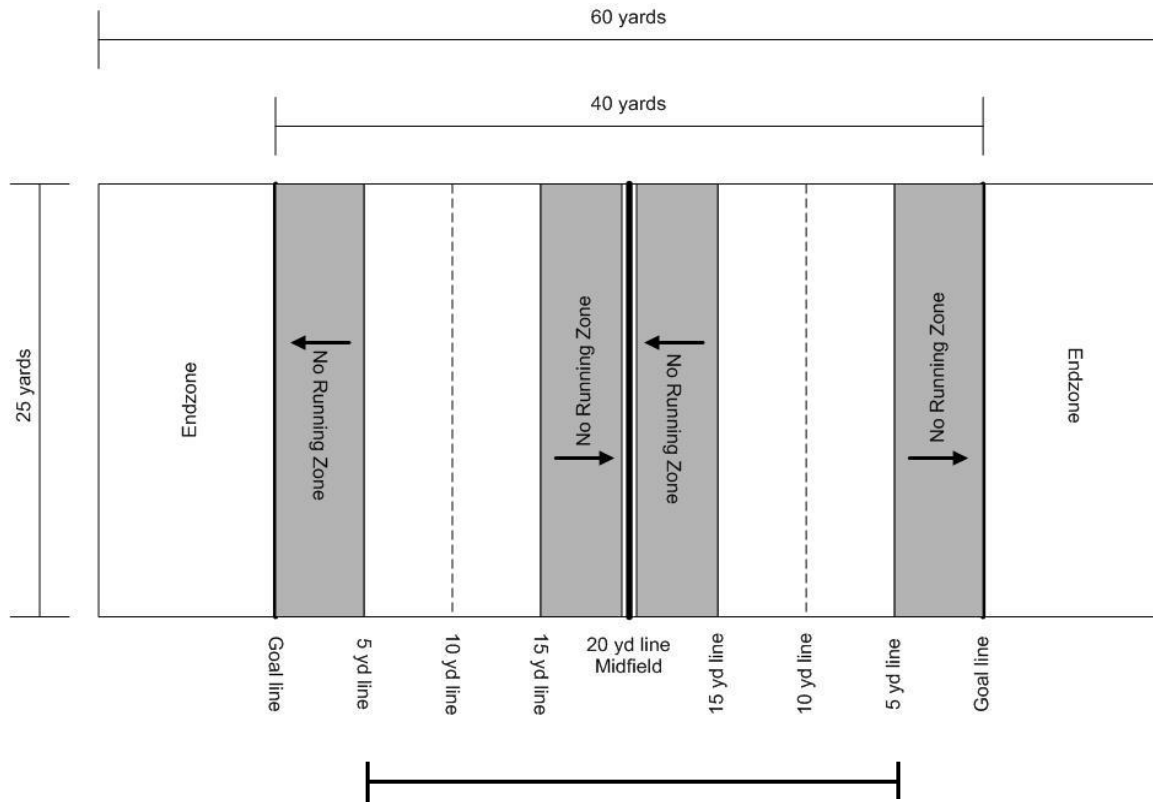
- b) Unified Sports® teams are expected to comply with this rule without intervention by officials.
- c) Failure to adhere to the required ratio shall result in an unsportsmanlike penalty being assessed against the coach.
- d) In addition to the unsportsmanlike conduct penalty, a violation may result in any of the following in progressive order based on the duration and impact of the violation as determined equitable by the officials:
 - i) Loss of plays
 - ii) Loss of possession
 - iii) Loss of scoring play(s)
 - iv) Forfeit
- e) More than one (1) forfeit or lineup violation in the season will lead to review by the Unified Sports Committee as to the path forward for the remainder of the season.
 - i) Games that are forfeits may be played to the finish, but both schools must verify with the referee before play begins/continues that they are playing under forfeit.

UNIFIED SPORTS® EXPECTATIONS

- 1) Players shall not be identified or distinguished as athletes or partners in any way (e.g., announced on public address system, listed in program, different colored wrist bands, odd/even jersey numbers, etc.)
- 2) The coach is responsible for providing 2 copies of the team's lineup card.
- 3) Unified Partners shall NOT dominate play.
- 4) During player possession, it is illegal for a defensive player to strip or pull the ball from the ball carrier at any time.
- 5) Ball carriers MUST make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position.
- 6) Defenders are not allowed to run through the ball carrier when pulling flags.

FIELD OF PLAY

- 1) The Flag Football field shall be a rectangle 60 yards long by 25 yards wide.
- 2) The endzones are each 10 yards long and are included in the above dimensions.
- 3) NO RUNNING ZONES The purpose of "No Running Zones" is to avoid short yardage power running situations.
 - a) "No Running Zones" are located 5-yards before the mid-field line and goal line.
 - b) Any ball snapped from these zones must be passed.
- 4) During the game substitutes, coaches, and team attendants should be located on opposite sidelines from the other team and between the 5-yard lines and 5-yards from the boundary line.



30-yard Player & Coaches Box must be at least 5-yards from the boundary line

THE GAME

- 1) 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.
- 2) Timing
 - a) The game shall consist of **four quarters (10 minutes)** as defined below (running time).
 - i) Time will stop in the last 2 minutes of the fourth quarter according to the rules of football.
 - ii) The clock will stop on all time-outs, scores, extra points, injuries, and changes of possession.
 - iii) Officials can stop the clock at their discretion (injuries, delays).
 - b) Each team receives two (2) 60-second time-outs **per game**.
 - c) There shall be a 5-minute break at halftime.
 - d) If, at any time during the second half, one team is leading its opponent by 25 or more points, the timing procedures will be modified as listed on the next page.



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The clock will be stopped only in the following instances:

1. A charged time-out.
 2. An officials' time-out for safety reasons, i.e. player appears to be injured, unusual heat or humidity creates health risk for players, player needs equipment repair, non-participant enters playing field, or other situations deemed to be safety related.
 3. A one-minute intermission between the third and fourth periods.
 4. If the differential is reduced to fewer than 25 points, regular timing procedures will again be used.
- 3) Overtime - If the score is tied at the end of regulation play:
- a) Following a three-minute intermission, a coin toss is held to determine first possession - winner of the coin toss will choose offense, defense, or end of field to defend.
 - b) All regulation rules and penalties are in effect.
 - c) The same end of the field will be used for possessions by both teams during each overtime period to ensure equal game conditions and conserve time.
 - d) Each team will be allowed 1 time out per overtime period. Time outs do not carry over from regulation to overtime or from one overtime period to the next.
 - e) Each team receives one (1) possession from the midfield line.
 - f) *Scoring (yardage)*
 - i) If a touchdown is scored the team will be awarded 6 points, the scoring team may then attempt either a 1-point (5-yard line) or 2-point (10-yard line) conversion.
 - ii) Team B will have its offensive opportunity.
 - iii) If there are no touchdowns scored after the first possession for both teams, the officials will record the yardage gained by each team.
 - iv) The team with the most yards gets 1 point and wins the game.
 - v) If the yardage gained is equal, the process should be repeated.
 - vi) If the score is still tied after completion of the 2nd overtime round, teams MUST attempt a 2-point (10-yard line) conversion if they score a touchdown.
 - vii) The procedure is repeated until one team wins.
 - viii) If multiple overtimes are necessary, teams will alternate the choice of offense, defense or end of field without a coin toss (i.e., the team captains who did not have first choice in the first overtime will have first choice to start the second, etc.).
- 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 for the defense. The defense will obtain possession at their own 5-yard line (heading towards midfield)

GAME PLAY

- 1) 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.



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- e) Interceptions change possession of the ball at the spot of the interception.
 - i) A ball intercepted inside the 5-yard line or 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.

Dead Balls/Fumbles

- i) There are no fumbles. The ball is spotted where it hits the ground and the offense retains possession.
- ii) Play is ruled dead when:
 - a) The ball carrier's flag is pulled.
 - b) The ball carrier loses his/her flag.
 - c) The ball carrier steps out of bounds.
 - d) Any part of the body other than feet or hands touches the ground.
 - e) A touchdown, extra point, or safety is scored.
 - f) When during a try-for-point the defense obtains possession of the ball.
 - g) When a forward pass strikes the ground or is caught simultaneously by opposing players (the offense retains possession);
 - h) A pass is intercepted (no returns);
 - i) A receiver catches a ball without his/her flags attached;
 - j) A snapped ball touches the ground
 - k) When there is an inadvertent whistle.

2) Offense

- a) No minimum number of players are required to line-up on the line of scrimmage.
- b) The ball must be snapped between the legs to start each play.
- c) Running
 - i) The Quarterback (player receiving the snap) CANNOT run to advance the ball.
 - ii) Laterals, pitches and direct hand-offs behind the line of scrimmage are legal at all levels of play.
 - iii) The player who takes a hand-off, lateral or pitch can pass the ball, as long as he/she does not pass the line of scrimmage.
 - iv) The ball carrier may not spin, dive, hurdle, or use either arm to shield a defender from grasping his/her flag.
 - v) The ball is spotted where the ball carrier's belt is when the flag is pulled.
- d) Passing and Receiving
 - i) **All passes must be forward.**
 - ii) All players are eligible to receive a forward pass, including the Quarterback, if he/she has legally handed-off.
 - iii) A team may only complete one forward pass per play.
- e) Only one (1) player is allowed in motion at the snap and he/she may not be moving toward the line of scrimmage at the snap.
- f) A catch is the act of establishing player possession of a live ball which is in flight, and first contacting the ground inbounds while maintaining possession of the ball. For a catch to be legal at least one foot must contact the ground inbounds prior to any other body part touching the ground out of bounds.
- g) Screen Blocking
 - i) Legally obstructing an opponent without contacting him/her with any part of the screen blocker's body. Screen blocking is the only form of legal blocking that can be used by any player at any time.



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- ii) The screen blocker shall have his/her arms fully extended to the ground (below the waist) either at his/her side, in front, or behind his/her back.
 - iii) Any use of arms, elbows, hips, shoulders or legs to initiate contact during the screen block is illegal.
 - iv) A player must be on his/her feet before, during, and after screen blocking.
 - v) If any of the provisions listed are violated, and contact results, the screener has committed an illegal block.
 - vi) The screen blocker must give an opponent at least one (1) step. 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.
 - vii) The screen blocker must not initiate contact with opponent.
 - h) Shielding (Flag Guarding)
 - i) Runners or teammates 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.
 - ii) This includes:
 - (1) Swinging the hand or arm over the flag belt.
 - (2) Placing the ball in a position over the flag belt.
 - (3) Lowering the shoulders or arm over the flag belt.
 - (4) Running alongside person with the ball.
 - i) Motion
 - i) Only one player of the offensive team may be in motion at the snap.
 - ii) This player must be behind the Quarterback and not moving toward its goal line at the time the ball is snapped.
 - iii) If the player comes to a stop, he/she must be set for one (1) second.
 - j) Shift
 - i) 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.
 - ii) A player who shifts must reset for one (1) second prior to the snap.
- 3) Defense
- a) Rushing the Quarterback (QB)
 - i) All players who rush the Quarterback must be a minimum of 5-yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.
 - (1) An official will designate the spot 5-yards from the line of scrimmage.
 - ii) Players not rushing the quarterback may defend the line of scrimmage.
 - b) Once the Quarterback hands off the ball, the 5-yard zone no longer exists, and all defenders are eligible to rush.
 - c) Defenders may not intentionally draw contact or make contact with any players. This includes moving/hitting a screen blocker to get to the ball carrier and bump & run defense on receivers.
- 4) Penalties
- a) The following Offensive penalties will result in the choice (by the team captain of the defensive team) of the result of the play or 10-yards from the line of scrimmage and loss of down:
 - (1) Illegal forward pass;
 - (2) Pass Interference (picking or pushing defender);
 - (3) Illegal Contact (holding, blocking, bumping);
 - (4) Flag Guarding (driving, spinning, warding off);



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- (5) If any of the above Offensive penalties occur on 4th down the result will be the choice (by the team captain of the defensive team) of the result of the play or change of possession according to the rules of possession.
- b) The following Defensive penalties will result in the choice (by the team captain of the offensive team) of the result of the play or 10-yards from the line of scrimmage and automatic first down:
 - (1) Pass Interference;
 - (2) Illegal Contact (holding, blocking, bumping);
 - (3) Illegal Flag Pull (before receiver has ball);
 - (4) Illegal Rushing (rushing Quarterback inside 5-yard line).
 - (5) If any of the above Defensive penalties occur in the endzone, the Offensive team will be awarded a touchdown.
- c) The following penalties are dead ball penalties and automatically accepted (no declination).
 - i) Offense: 5-yards from the line of scrimmage
 - (1) Illegal Motion (more than one (1) player moving at snap, moving forward at snap);
 - (2) Offside (in neutral zone at snap, false start);
 - (3) Delay of Game.
 - ii) Defense: 5-yards from the line of scrimmage and automatic first down
 - (1) Offside (in or beyond neutral zone at snap).
 - (2) Delay of Game.
 - iii) No penalty may take the ball more than half the distance to the offender's goal line.
- 5) 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.

UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT

- 1) The officials may disqualify any player who participates in rough or unsportsmanlike play, including seeking to strip or pull the ball from the ball carrier at any time, or a ball carrier failing to make an effort to avoid a defender who has established his/her position.
- 2) Any player or coach who is charged for two unsportsmanlike fouls is automatically disqualified from the game.
- 3) No coach, player, substitute, or team attendant shall behave in an unsportsmanlike manner. Examples are, but not limited to:
 - a) Unnecessarily rough play
 - b) Profanity
 - c) Disrespecting the officials
 - d) Failure to comply with equipment and uniform requirements
 - e) Taunting opponents
 - f) Any act in which a player attempts to focus attention on him/herself (e.g. spiking the ball, showboating, dancing following a good play)
 - g) No team shall repeatedly commit fouls which halve the distance to the goal line.
 - h) Neither team shall commit any act which, in the opinion of the referee, tends to make a mockery of the game. (i.e.: Creating plays to find loopholes in rules, intentionally committing penalties to gain an advantage)
 - i) The referee will enforce any penalty he/she considers equitable, including the award of a score for an unfair act if, without the unfair act occurring, the play might have resulted in a score.



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DEFINITIONS

- 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 time-out.
 - 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 time-out has been granted.
 - 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. A player cannot dive in an attempt to gain extra yardage.
 - c) The team will be penalized accordingly.
- 3) Eligible Receiver
 - a) All offensive players are eligible to receive a pass.
- 4) False Start
 - a) No member of either the offensive or defensive team may simulate the start of the play before the ball is snapped either verbally or physically.
- 5) Handling the Ball
 - a) Handling the ball is transferring player possession from one teammate to another without throwing or kicking it.
 - b) A ball carrier may hand the ball backward at any time.
- 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.
 - b) 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) 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.
 - i) Unified Sports teams must pass the ball through the legs for a legal snap
 - ii) Traditional & Youth teams can use either the pass the ball through the legs or snap from the side.



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CASE BOOK PLAYS

- 1) **Play:** Team A snaps the ball from its 5-yard line to start a new series. The Quarterback muffs the snap and it touches first in the end zone.

Result: Safety. The ball is dead where it touches the ground on a muff or fumble.

- 2) **Play:** Team B intercepts a pass at its own 3-yard line.

Result: The ball is spotted at the 5-yard line for the new series.

- 3) **Play:** Team A secures a first down, advancing the ball (by run or pass) two yards beyond the midfield line. On the next play Team A commits a false start infraction, thus moving the ball behind the midfield line. Does Team A gain a first down if they cross midfield again?

Result: No. A team may obtain only one first down during any series.

- 4) **Play:** Team A's Quarterback makes a legal handoff to a teammate who looks to pass the ball from behind his line of scrimmage. A Team B player who is lined up on his line of scrimmage rushes the player who is attempting a pass and pulls his flag.

Result: Legal play. Once the Quarterback hands the ball to a teammate, any defensive player may rush.



SAMPLE ROSTER CARD

COMMENT: The privacy of our athletes must be protected. Identifying or in any way distinguishing between athletes and partners beyond those responsible for the administration of the contest violates the values, philosophies and rules of Unified Sports® and may be a violation of federal law under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

The purpose of providing line-up cards is solely for the administration of the contest in hopes of avoiding the potentially contentious and even sportsmanlike challenges based on the rules of Unified Flag Football (maximum number on game roster, ratio of athletes/partners on the field). These challenges are often based on a harmful stereotype that students who have an intellectual disability cannot be excellent players.

The proper procedure for a coach who thinks that there might have been a violation of a roster rule by the opposing team is to: 1.) Check the lineup card from the opposing team and then 2.) Quietly and respectfully request the official to confirm with the opposing coach. Game roster cards should be treated as confidential information and should not be shared with anyone else. Game roster cards should be returned to the coach after the contest or be appropriately discarded.

Unified Sports® Flag Football		
TEAM:		DATE:
COACH:		
#	PLAYERS NAME	A / P