



**FOOTBALL**

# **REFEREE HANDBOOK**





Upward Flag Football

# **REFEREE HANDBOOK**

©2025 Upward Unlimited.

Upward\* is a registered trademark of Upward Unlimited.

# Table of Contents

## **Welcome to Upward Flag Football**

Introduction.....	3
-------------------	---

## **SECTION ONE:**

### **Refereeing Upward Flag Football**

Becoming an Upward Flag Football Referee ....	6
Communicating with Coaches and Players .....	8
Controlling the Game .....	9

## **SECTION TWO:**

### **Rules Unique to Upward Flag Football**

Field Diagram and Format .....	14
Offensive Basics .....	20
Defensive Basics .....	24

## **SECTION THREE:**

### **Calling the Game**

How to Make a Call .....	28
What to Watch For .....	29
Penalties .....	30
Positioning and Responsibilities .....	37
Hand Signals .....	38



# Welcome to Upward Flag Football

This handbook is designed to provide you with what you need to be a successful Upward Flag Football Referee. The information on the following pages is designed to guide you through the season and includes the rule enhancements for Upward Flag Football.

Along with this handbook, you can find resources on ***MyUpward.org***. Contact your league director for details on how to access these resources.

It is also important for officials to understand the goals of the sports ministry, what success looks like, and how success is measured. These points can be discovered at the preseason referee meeting prior to the season or by consulting with the league director.

The goal of our sports ministry is:

---

---

Success looks like:

---

---

Success is measured by:

---

---





**“And you must love the Lord  
your God with all your heart,  
all your soul, all your mind,  
and all your strength.”**

Mark 12:30 (NLT)

# 1

## Refereeing Upward Flag Football

### **Chapter Overview:**

- 6      Becoming an Upward Flag Football Referee
- 8      Communicating with Coaches and Players
- 9      Controlling the Game



# Becoming an Upward Flag Football Referee

Upward Flag Football is designed to promote healthy competition and sportsmanship while also teaching the objectives of game play. Coaches will teach the basic fundamentals of football through drills, plays, and scrimmages and share life lessons through mid-practice huddles. While teaching the game, a coaches top priority is to promote the discovery of Jesus through sports. You can help support the coach in how you officiate the game. As an Upward Flag Football Referee, you set the tone of the gameday experience by bringing a positive influence to the game.

It is important that you understand your responsibilities as a referee:

## › **Understand and Know The Sport**

- Begin by knowing and understanding the sport, the rules of football, and the unique rules for each level of play. Knowing these things will help you to be confident as you blow the whistle and make calls. Use the whistle, use hand signals, and explain the violations as they occur.

## › **Lead By Example**

- It is important that referees are role models on the field. You should demonstrate a Christlike attitude through your officiating and through the encouragement of players. Provide positive comments to players during the game for their play, effort, and sportsmanship.



## › **Control The Game**

- Upward Flag Football referees represent the highest level of authority on the field. It is important not to let play become rough, and safety should be a top priority for referees. Any rough play should be stopped immediately by making the appropriate calls.
- Coaches, spectators, and players appreciate a well-played game and consistent enforcement of the rules. Call the game consistently for everyone to help them learn the game.

## › **Blow the whistle**

- Beginning with the first game referees should blow the whistle often and make calls. If you let things slide, this will delay players learning the game and frustrate players, coaches, and spectators later in the season. Players will learn and grow from early season whistles, which results in referees blowing the whistle less often as the season progresses.

## › **Communicate Effectively with Coaches, Players, and Spectators**

- You will serve as on-the-field coach, teaching the game as it happens. Simple communication can provide a lot of direction. Things like, "Move up 88, there you go, you're on the line-of-scrimmage now." "Watch your hands 22; keep them away from your flags while you carry the ball."
- Hand signals should accompany all penalties that are called. Coaches and spectators need to know the result of the penalty.
- Talk with coaches during gameplay and at possession changes. Communicate what you are seeing; build rapport and confidence with the coaches.
- Before the game begins, it is important to communicate with your referee partner. Talk about positioning and review the responsibilities for each of you. Basic communication before the game begins will make a positive difference during the game.



## › **Employ Proper Positioning and Refereeing Mechanics**

- This includes coordinating efforts with your referee partner, blowing the whistle, using hand signals, and keeping the game on track.

# Communicating With Coaches and Players

## **Communicating with Coaches**

As teams are warming up, take time to introduce yourself to the coaches. Ask if there's anything in particular that you need to know about. A heads-up on trick plays or certain strategies may help you make the right calls during gameplay.

During the game, coaches want to know which penalties are being called. Referees should communicate clearly with the coaches and give proper hand signals to avoid confusion.

Going into halftime is a good opportunity to set the tone for the second half. This may be a time when a coach has a question about particular rules or violations from the first half.

## **Communicating with Players**

The referee sets the tone for the game by gathering both teams and their coaches at midfield for a brief word of encouragement and prayer. This also serves as a time to remind players what potential penalties to be aware of throughout the game. Through words of encouragement and warning, referees are often able to prevent a penalty from occurring.



Here are a few things to cover during this pregame meeting:

- › Be sure all players have their flags on their hips and their jerseys tucked in.
- › Be sure to encourage players.

Have players remove all hats, jewelry, and watches.

- › Give reminders for gameplay (three offensive players on the line of scrimmage before the snap; unless in motion, all offensive players must be set on the snap of the ball, etc.)
- › Remind players and coaches the reasons to play Upward Flag Football: to have fun and to honor God with their actions and attitudes.

Be sure to encourage players. This will go a long way toward building players' self-esteem. Since referees are out on the field with the players, they have the perfect opportunity to encourage them.

## Controlling the Game

The referee must keep the game under control, while promoting a competitive experience. The best way to do this is to blow the whistle to end play and to call penalties when they occur. Any time a play ends, both referees should blow their whistles and spot the ball. Any rough play should be penalized first and warned second. If rough play is not stopped quickly, it will escalate and undermine the purpose of this league. Keeping the game under control will create a safe environment for which both coaches and parents will be grateful.

### **Clock Management**

Managing the clock is an important function for the referees. You'll monitor two clocks throughout the game: the game clock and the play clock.



## **Game Clock Management**

Referee #2 manages the game clock. Upward Flag Football has four 9-minute quarters. The game clock stops in the following instances with less than one minute before halftime or one minute before the end of the game:

- › After an incomplete pass
- › After the ball carrier goes out of bounds
- › After a touchdown
- › During an extra-point attempt
- › During an official's timeout
- › At the conclusion of an interception return
- › During a called timeout, until the ball is snapped to resume play
- › A dead ball penalty or at the end of a play where a penalty has occurred
- › On a change of possession

Note: A half or game cannot end on a defensive penalty. After the penalty is applied, the offense will be awarded one untimed down.

Each team will have one 30-second timeout per half. Unused timeouts do not carry over to the next half.

## **Play Clock Management**

Referee #1 manages the play clock. After the referee spots the ball, the offensive team has 30 seconds to snap it to declare it ready for play. The offensive team should be warned when only 10 seconds remain on the play clock. If the ball is not snapped by the expiration of the play clock, the whistle should be blown, and a delay-of-game penalty should be administered.

To allow both teams a maximum number of plays per game, enforce the 30-second play clock.



## Penalties

Referees will call all penalties. It is very important to understand which penalties stop a play and which don't. In most cases, a penalty flag should be thrown in the direction of the play, and the play continues. The penalty will be addressed at the end of the play. For the following situations, the penalty stops the play, and the penalty can be addressed right away:

- › Delay of game
- › Encroachment
- › False start
- › Neutral Zone Infraction

If a penalty happens near the end zone, where the penalty yardage would place the ball in the end zone, then the penalty will be half the distance to the goal.

## Managing Substitutions

Substitutions take place on two occasions: at the beginning of each quarter and each time the ball changes possession.

- › At the beginning of each quarter, coaches will communicate to players the offensive and defensive groups for that quarter. This should take no more than 30 seconds.
- › After each possession change, the player group on the field will change. This should take only a few seconds, as all it requires is some players being replaced on the field (players running off and on the field).

It's important to keep these substitutions moving as quickly as possible. Remind coaches that this is not a timeout.



**“So then, let us aim for  
harmony in the church and try  
to build each other up.”**

Romans 14:19 (NLT)

# 2

## Rules To Upward Flag Football

### **Chapter Overview:**

- 14 Field Diagram and Format
- 20 Offensive Basics
- 24 Defensive Basics



The rules of Upward Flag Football are designed to promote healthy competition and sportsmanship while teaching the objectives of the game.

## Field Diagram and Format

- › The offensive team is awarded a first down when it crosses the midfield line. Based on the field size, one first down is sufficient to advance the football for a score.
- › The lines 5 yards from each end zone and on both sides of the midfield line are no-run zones. No-run zones do not apply to the K5 division. The no-run zones are designed to take away power-running plays.
- › If an offensive team picks up a first down by crossing midfield but is then pushed back into the no-run zone, the no-run zone will not apply, and the offensive team cannot pick up another first down.
- › If an offensive team is in the no-run zone which applies to them and loses yardage due to a penalty or any play (for example, taking a knee, running out of bounds, negative yardage play), they are **NOT** considered as being in the no-run zone.
- › If an offensive team is attempting an extra point from the 5-yard line (pass only) and is penalized, they are still only able to attempt an extra point with a pass for one point. If an offensive team is attempting an extra point from the 10-yard line (run or pass) and the defense is penalized, the offense is still able to run or pass for two points.
- › As there are no kickoffs, the offensive team begins the game and second half by taking possession of the ball at its 5-yard line.





# Down Format

## **K5 and 1st Grades**

- › The offensive team has four downs to gain a first down by crossing midfield. Once a team crosses midfield, it has four downs to score a touchdown.
- › If the team fails to cross midfield in four downs or score a touchdown, the other team takes possession on its own 5-yard line. There will be no punts for this division. All four downs will be used without the concern of giving up field position.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Grade and Up**

- › The offensive team has four downs to gain a first down by crossing midfield. Once a team crosses midfield, it has four downs to score a touchdown.
- › On fourth down, a team has two options:
  - A team may attempt to gain a first down or a touchdown. If a team fails to convert on fourth down, either by scoring or picking up a first down, the ball changes possession at the no-run zone before midfield going into the first down.
  - A team may “punt” as its fourth-down play by notifying the referee. In this case, the ball will be placed on the opposing team’s 5-yard line, and there will be a change of possession.



# Offensive starting points

## (K5- | <sup>9<sup>th</sup></sup> Grades)

SITUATION	STARTING FIELD POSITION AFTER CHANGE OF POSSESSION
After a touchdown and extra-point(s) attempt	Offense's 5-yard line
After a turnover on downs	Offense's 5-yard line
After an interception	At the spot of the tackle if there is not a score

## (2<sup>nd</sup> Grade and Up)

SITUATION	STARTING FIELD POSITION AFTER CHANGE OF POSSESSION
After a touchdown and extra-point(s) attempt	Offense's 5-yard line
After a "punt"	Offense's 5-yard line
After a turnover on downs	<del>the run zone going in the first quarter (midfield line)</del>
After an interception	At the spot of the tackle if there is not a score



## Clock Format

- › Games consist of four 9-minute quarters with an 8-minute halftime.
- › The game clock stops briefly at the end of every quarter for predetermined substitutions.
- › Each team has one 30-second timeout per half. Unused timeouts do not carry over to the second half. The clock will stop during the timeout.
- › A 30-second play clock begins after the referee spots the ball as ready for play.
- › The clock will stop in the final minute of the first half and in the final minute of the game for the following situations:
  - After an incomplete pass
  - After the ball carrier goes out of bounds
  - After a touchdown
  - During an extra-point attempt
  - For an official's timeout
  - At the conclusion of the interception return
  - During a called timeout until the ball is snapped
  - On a change of possession
  - For a penalty. Keep in mind the half or game may not end on a defensive penalty unless the offense declines the penalty.

## Game Format

Upward Flag Football leagues feature an enhanced game format.

- › Referees lead both teams in prayer at midfield before every game. This is a good time to give reminders about the game and to check that flags are on hips, jerseys are tucked in, jewelry has been removed, and coaches have their substitutions ready for the game.



- › The visiting team *starts with the ball.*

The team that plays defense first will play offense to start the second half.

- › Because the end of a quarter does not signal a change of possession, the team with possession at the end of the first and third quarters will retain possession after substitutions take place.
- › Teams will switch ends of the field at the half, not after each quarter.
- › Upward Sports recommends six players on the field per team, but numbers can be adjusted based upon the size of your league. Six players equips the offense with an appropriate amount of players without crowding the field.
- › Coaches are allowed to walk the sidelines and encourage their players without stepping in the playing area.
- › In the *2<sup>nd</sup>* grade and up divisions, each team can put one coach in the huddle for the first two games of the season. In any *1<sup>st</sup>* grade and under division, each team can put one coach in the huddle throughout the season.
- › Teams will use substitution rules, as detailed below.

## Substitutions

Upward Sports' substitution system is designed to provide each player equal opportunity for improvement. The system ensures that:

- › No player sits out more than one possession at a time.



- › Every player plays offense and defense in every game.
- › Every player will start on either offense or defense in each game.
- › In most cases, each player will play against someone of equal ability.
- › Coaches do not have to monitor playing time for each player.
- › Playing time for all players is virtually even over the course of the season.

## Scoring

- › Touchdown: 6 points
- › Extra point: 1 point (played from the 5-yard line, no-run zone with a pass) or 2 points (played from the 10-yard line with a run or pass)
- › Safety: 2 points. The scoring team will also receive possession on its own 5-yard line. No physical kicks will occur in Upward Flag Football.

## Offensive Basics

- › A minimum of three players must be on the line of scrimmage at every snap. Traditional football format requires seven players on the line of scrimmage at the snap of the ball. The three players on the line for Upward Flag Football will consist of a center and two receivers positioned anywhere along the line of scrimmage. This adds some structure to offensive sets.
- › Only one player can be in motion when the ball is snapped. This is intact to keep the integrity of the game.
- › In the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and up divisions, the ball



is snapped between the legs to begin play. In any division }<sup>s</sup> grade and under, players may use the side snap. The traditional snap can be difficult for the younger players with small hands.

- › Before handing off or passing, the quarterback must have complete, unshared possession of the ball. This also helps clarify the center sneak play. A possession change between the center and quarterback must occur in order to run a play.
- › Low-profile field cones or beanbags are used to designate the line of scrimmage and the 10-yard rush line for the defense.

## **Running the Football**

- › The quarterback cannot advance the ball across the line of scrimmage. However, they may scramble behind the line of scrimmage. This is in place to include others in each offensive play. Without this rule, a quarterback could dominate each play by advancing the football.
- › The person who receives the snap from the center (under-center or shot-gun) is considered the quarterback.
- › Direct handoffs behind the line of scrimmage are legal. Multiple handoffs may be used. After the ball crosses the line of scrimmage, handoffs and underhand or overhand forward or backward passes are not permitted.
- › The 5 yards leading toward the goal line and the 5 yards leading to the midfield first-down line are no-run zones. The no-run zones do not apply to the K5 division.
- › A player receiving a handoff or backward pass can pass the ball forward from behind the line of scrimmage.



- › A ball carrier may not dive. A dive will result in a penalty. This is for safety and abides with the no contact rule.
- › The ball carrier's feet determine the spot of the football when a flag is pulled, not the location of the football. This is to discourage a dive for advancement.
- › If a ball carrier who has established possession of the ball fumbles the ball into an opposing player's hands without the ball touching the ground, the play is considered a fumble. This is a dead ball at the spot where the player lost the ball. If a ball carrier attempts a legal or illegal pass and the hand and arm are coming forward, it is ruled as a pass and, therefore, an interception.

### **Receiving the Football**

- › All six players are eligible to receive passes. (The quarterback becomes eligible after a handoff or backward pass.) With the no-contact rule, no blockers can be used thus, allowing all offensive players to be eligible.
- › A completion consists of a receiver gaining control of the football in bounds while having at least one foot touch in bounds before stepping out of bounds. This rule is to keep the integrity of the game.
- › If a player catches a pass and any part of their body other than their feet or hands is touching the ground, the play is blown dead, and the ball is spotted at the point of completion.
- › Simultaneous possession by an offensive and defensive player is awarded to the offensive player.

### **Passing the Football**

- › A forward pass can be completed behind or beyond the line of scrimmage. Only one



forward pass can be completed per play.

However, while in the no-run zone, only a forward pass caught beyond the line of scrimmage can advance the ball out of the no-run zone.

- › A backward pass can only be executed by the quarterback.
  - A backward pass can only occur while behind the line of scrimmage and only one completed per play.
  - A backward pass (over or underhand) includes a pass from the quarterback that travels parallel to the line of scrimmage or away from the end zone where the offense is attempting to score.
  - An incomplete backward pass is a fumble and a dead ball where it first hits the ground or where it travels out of bounds before hitting the ground.
- › Once the ball leaves the quarterback's hand, the defender can make a play on the ball. The defender must avoid contact with the receiver.
- › The quarterback has 7 seconds to throw a pass. If a pass is not thrown within 7 seconds, it is treated as an incomplete pass (loss of down). A handoff or pass will end the 7-second pass count. This rule keeps a scrambling quarterback from taking too much time behind the line of scrimmage with each possession.

## **Dead Balls**

Play is ruled dead when one of the following occurs:

- › The ball carrier's flag is pulled
- › A player establishes possession of the ball after their flag has fallen out on its own.
- › The ball carrier steps out of bounds.



- › The ball carrier touches the ground with anything other than their hands or feet.
- › A touchdown or safety is scored.
- › A pass falls incomplete.
- › At the conclusion of an interception return.
- › When the ball is fumbled, the ball will be spotted at the location where the player fumbled the ball.
  - One exception to this rule is . . . . . If a center/quarterback exchange is mishandled, the quarterback, and only the quarterback, may pick up the ball and continue play. If a legal defender gets to the ball before the quarterback, the play is ruled dead and the ball is spotted at the point of the fumble (treated like a sack).

## Defensive Basics

- › Teams may run man-to-man, zone defenses, or a combination of both. This rule allows for defensive schemes and helps equal ability match-ups. Players may have an easier time covering a receiver in a zone vs man-to-man in the open field.
- › Interceptions may be returned and are awarded six points for a touchdown or on extra points are awarded two points. Interceptions not returned for a score are spotted where the play ends.
- › Interceptions made and downed in the end zone will result in a touchback and spotted at the 5-yard line.
- › Fumbles are dead balls and may not be recovered by the defense. This prevents players from diving for a ball.



## Rushing the Passer and the Rush Line

- › All players who are rushing the quarterback must begin 10 yards from the line of scrimmage. Before each snap, the referee will designate the 10-yard rush line with a small beanbag or low profile cone. The rush line extends in a straight line from sideline to sideline. With no blocking allowed, this gives the quarterback enough time to make a play or escape a rush.
  - A league director may adjust the distance of the rush line to any division.
- › With the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and up divisions, any number of players may rush the quarterback. *Game 5 Kindergarten/1st will not rush.*
- › Defenders not rushing the quarterback may line up on or off the line of scrimmage. In the K5 division, three defenders must line up 10 yards from the line of scrimmage. Having three players line up 10 yards from the line of scrimmage for the K5 group keeps the congestion from forming along the line of scrimmage. This is key since a majority of K5 plays are running plays.
- › Once the ball leaves the quarterback's hand, the 10-yard rule is no longer in effect, and all defenders may cross the line of scrimmage to pursue the ball carrier. This allows the defense to react quickly to a play behind the line of scrimmage.



## Rule Adjustments by Division

RULE	K5/ <sup>1st</sup>			2 <sup>nd</sup> GRADE AND UP
NO-RUN ZONES APPLY	NO			YES
OPTION TO PUNT	NO			YES
COACH IN HUDDLE	ALL SEASON			GAMES 1, 2
DEFENDERS ALLOWED AT LINE OF SCRIMMAGE	3			ALL
NUMBER OF RUSHERS ALLOWED	1			GAME 5 + ALL
SIDE SNAP ALLOWED	YES			NO

# 3

## Calling The Game

### **Chapter Overview:**

- 28 How to Make a Call
- 29 What to Watch For
- 30 Penalties
- 37 Positioning and Responsibilities
- 38 Hand Signals



# How to Make a Call

When a penalty is committed, the referee should throw a penalty flag in the direction of the penalty. Don't blow the whistle! Only blow the whistle when the penalty is a dead-ball penalty. Dead-ball penalties include delay of game, encroachment, false start, and neutral zone infraction.

On the snap, it is critical that referees move based on the direction of play so that they are in position to make the right call. Once play begins, referees should not find themselves in a location where it hinders players' ability to see the field.

If the penalty was committed during play, the referee should throw the flag to mark where the penalty was committed and let the play continue. After the play has ended, the referee should treat the penalty as follows:

1. Quickly explain the penalty to players by telling them how it can be avoided and the result of the penalty. The extent of the explanation will vary according to the age and understanding of the players and will decrease as the season progresses.
2. Ask the non-offending team if they wish to accept the penalty or decline the penalty and keep the result of the previous play.
3. Let the coach and fans know the reason for and consequence of the penalty.

Referees should use proper hand signals so that players, coaches, and spectators know what occurred during the play. This adds to the enjoyment of the game.



# What to Watch For

Upward Flag Football is governed by an enhanced set of rules. As a referee, it is your responsibility to know and uphold these rules. In addition to the rules listed in this section, there are a few things to watch for during play.

## Center-Quarterback Exchange

In **ALL** divisions, a fumbled center-quarterback exchange may only be picked up by the quarterback as play continues. If a defender begins from behind the 10-yard rush line gets to the ball before the quarterback, the ball is dead at the spot where it is touched by the defender and the offense maintains possession. (unless it was fourth down, then see rules regarding change of possession)

This rule applies to both under center and shotgun snaps.

## Flags on Hips/Jerseys Tucked In

In Upward Flag Football, all players are required to have their flags on their hips and their jerseys tucked in. Coaches should monitor that after each play. An offensive ball carrier who is not in compliance with this gains an unfair advantage against the defense. Out-of-position flags and untucked jerseys give an unfair advantage because they impede a defender from pulling the flag. As a referee, you need to be aware of this situation. When this occurs, the play should be blown dead



at the first attempt at a flag pull. Assume that the defender would have been successful in pulling the flag if not impeded.

### **Lining Up Properly**

Referees may help younger players line up properly. The offense should have three players on the line of scrimmage at the snap. Remind players of this as they line up. The line of scrimmage for each team is a vertical plane through the point of the ball nearest the team's goal line. Each player at the line of scrimmage should break the plane through the snapper's waist to the line of scrimmage with either their head or foot.

## **Penalties**

Referees will call all penalties so that players learn the game.

If a penalty happens near the end zone, where the penalty yardage would place the ball in the end zone, then the penalty will be half the distance to the goal.

The Neutral Zone is defined as the space between the forward and backward tips of the football while it rests on the field prior to the snap.

A game or half can not end on a defensive penalty. The offense will be awarded one untimed play unless the penalty is declined.

### **Defensive Penalties**

#### **Defensive Pass Interference**

A flag is thrown, and play continues. The penalty is 10 yards from the line of scrimmage and an automatic first down.

Pass interference is contact which hinders or restricts



an opportunity for an eligible player to catch a forward pass after the ball has been thrown.

### **Encroachment**

The whistle is blown, flag thrown, and play is dead immediately. The penalty is 5 yards from the line of scrimmage and a replay of the down.

Encroachment occurs when a defensive player enters the neutral zone and **makes contact** with an offensive player or the football prior to the snap.

### **Illegal Contact**

Flag is thrown, and play continues. The penalty is 10 yards from the spot of the foul and an automatic first down.

Any contact, such as, blocking, physically tackling, knocking a player down while attempting to pull a flag, holding, pushing, or jersey-pulling will result in an illegal contact penalty.

### **Illegal Flag Pull**

Flag is thrown, and play continues. The penalty is 10 yards from the spot of the foul and an automatic first down.

This occurs when a defender pulls the flag of a receiver **prior** to catching the ball.

### **Illegal Formation**

A flag is thrown, and play continues. The penalty is 5 yards and a replay of the down.

### **Illegal Rushing**

A flag is thrown, and play continues. The penalty is 5 yards from the line of scrimmage and a replay of the down.

Illegal rushing is enforced when a player who starts in front of the designated rush line crosses the line of scrimmage before a handoff or pass that leaves the quarterback's hands.

There is no penalty for a player who starts from



behind the designated rush line and moves in front of the designated rush line so long as they do not also then cross the line of scrimmage.

The designated rush line is 10-yards from the line of scrimmage, should be marked with a beanbag or low profile cone and extends in a straight line from sideline to sideline.

### **Neutral Zone Infraction**

The whistle is blown, flag thrown, and play is dead immediately. The penalty is 5 yards from the line of scrimmage and a replay of the down.

When a defensive player moves into the neutral zone prior to the snap causing a nearby offensive player to react.

### **Offside**

A flag is thrown, and play continues. The penalty is 5 yards from the line of scrimmage and a replay of the down.

A player on defense is offside if they line up in or beyond the neutral zone at the snap.

### **Stripping**

A flag is thrown, and play continues. The penalty is 10 yards from the spot of the foul and an automatic first down.

A defensive player may not attempt to strip the ball from the ball carrier.

## **Offensive Penalties**

### **Delay of Game**

The whistle is blow, flag thrown, and play is dead immediately. The penalty is 5 yards from the line of scrimmage and a replay of the down.

A delay of game penalty occurs when the offense does not snap the ball before the 30-second play



clock expires. Referees should warn the offense when the play clock reaches 10 seconds.

## **Diving**

A flag is thrown, and play continues. The penalty is 10 yards from the line of scrimmage and loss down. Ball carriers may not dive toward the end zone or first down.

## **False Start**

The whistle is blown, flag thrown, and play is dead immediately. The penalty is 5 yards from the line of scrimmage and a replay of the down.

When prior to the snap an offensive player in a set position then moves their body or the football to simulate the start of a play.

## **Flag Guarding**

A flag is thrown, and play continues. The penalty is 10 yards from the spot of the foul and a loss of the down.

Flag guarding is intentional or unintentional use of the arm or hands to prevent a defender from pulling the flag.

## **Illegal Contact**

A flag is thrown, and play continues. The penalty is 10 yards from the spot of the foul and a loss of down.

Any contact, such as, blocking, physically tackling, knocking a player down who is attempting to pull a flag, holding, pushing, or jersey-pulling will result in an illegal contact penalty.

## **Illegal Formation**

A flag is thrown, and play continues. The penalty is 5 yards from the line of scrimmage and a replay of the down.

Illegal formation occurs when there are not three players lined up on the line of scrimmage.



## **Illegal Motion**

A flag is thrown, and play continues. The penalty is 5 yards from the line of scrimmage and a replay of the down.

It is illegal motion if a player under center goes in motion and fails to come to a complete stop for one second before the snap.

One player in the backfield, off the line of scrimmage, may be in motion prior to the snap but must be moving parallel to or away from the line of scrimmage.

If a player in the backfield or on the line of scrimmage is moving forward at the time of the snap, it is illegal motion.

If an eligible receiver on the line of scrimmage moves to another spot on the line of scrimmage they must come to a complete stop and may not be in motion prior to the snap.

## **Illegal Pass**

A flag is thrown, and play continues. The penalty is 5 yards from the line of scrimmage and a loss of down.

A pass thrown from beyond the line of scrimmage, more than one forward pass, more than one backward pass, or a pass not caught beyond the line of scrimmage to advance out of the no-run zone.

## **Illegal Run**

A flag is thrown, and play continues. The penalty is 5 yards from the line of scrimmage and a replay of the down.

An illegal run occurs when a player advances the ball beyond the line of scrimmage on a running play that begins in the no-run zone. It can also occur when the quarterback runs across the line of scrimmage with the ball.



When the ball is snapped in the no-run zone, the offense must advance the ball with a forward pass caught at a point beyond the line of scrimmage.

### **Illegal Use of the Hands**

A flag is thrown, and play continues. The penalty is 10 yards from the spot of the foul and loss down.

Illegal use of the hands occurs by stiff-arming or a player using their hands or arms in an attempt to stop or block an opponent.

### **Intentional Grounding**

A flag is thrown, whistle is blown, and the play is dead on the incomplete pass. The penalty is 5 yards from the line of scrimmage and a loss of down.

Intentional ground occurs when a passer, who is under pressure, throws a forward pass without a realistic chance of a pass completion. Intentional grounding also occurs if a quarterback delays a spike and is or is not under pressure and throws the ball to the ground.

Intentional grounding if in their own end zone when the ball is thrown the result is a safety.

### **Offensive Charging**

A flag is thrown, and play continues. The penalty is 10 yards from the spot of the foul and a loss of down.

Offensive charging occurs when an offensive player makes no attempt to avoid a defender and instead initiates contact and attempts to run through or knock down the defender.

### **Offensive Pass Interference**

A flag is thrown, and play continues. The penalty is 10 yards from the line of scrimmage and loss of down.



Pass interference is contact which hinders or restricts an opportunity for an eligible player to catch a forward pass after the ball has been thrown.

This includes an offensive player shoving or pushing a defender to create separation in order to catch a pass and when the ball is in the air setting a pick on a defender.

## **Offside**

A flag is thrown, and play continues. The penalty is 5 yards from the line of scrimmage and a replay of the down. A player on offense is offside if they line up in or beyond the neutral zone at the snap.

## **Shielding**

A flag is thrown, and play continues. The penalty is 5 yards from the spot of the foul and a loss of down.

Shielding is a non-contact block that impedes a defender from making a tackle. This could be other offensive players running immediately side by side, in front of, or behind a ball carrier to impede defenders from making a tackle.

## **Unsportsmanlike Conduct**

A flag is thrown, and play continues. The penalty is 10 yards from the line of scrimmage and, if against the offense, a loss of down or against the defense and an automatic first down.

Unsportsmanlike conduct includes any form of rough play or unsportsmanlike behavior such as taunting. If the severity of the conduct warrants it, remove players for the remainder of the game and report the player to the league director after the game so that they can handle any further consequences..



# Positioning and Responsibilities

One of the most important elements of being a referee is being in the right position to best see your area of responsibility. Upward Sports suggests having no fewer than two referees on the field of each game. Each referee will be assigned a number and a set of responsibilities. Referee #1 will be positioned on the line of scrimmage and will watch the offensive line and backfield. Referee #2 will be positioned at the defensive 10-yard rush line and will watch the defensive backfield. Referees must also be able to see the sidelines. This can best be accomplished by lining up diagonally from each other so each sideline will be covered by a referee. On the snap, referees should move based on the direction of the play. Don't stay in your starting position.

## **Primary Responsibilities of Referee #1**

- › Watch for penalties behind the line of scrimmage—things like illegal motion and illegal passes.
- › Mark the line of scrimmage with a low-profile cone after each play.
- › Keep the 7-second pass count.
- › Begin the 30-second play clock after ball has been spotted.
- › Keep track of 30-second timeouts.

## **Primary Responsibilities of Referee #2**

- › Mark the rush line by standing 10 yards from the line of scrimmage. A bean bag or low-profile cone can mark the rush line.
- › Watch eligible pass rushers.
- › Watch for penalties beyond the line of scrimmage.
- › Keep the game clock.

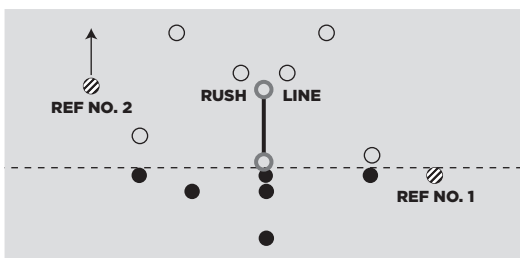
## **Responsibilities of Both Referees**

- › Keep track of downs.
- › Watch for penalties.



- › Watch the sidelines.
- › Spot the ball.
- › Move the cones or markers that mark the line of scrimmage and rush line.
- › Blow the whistle to end play. When one referee blows the whistle, the other should as well.
- › Monitor players to be sure flags are on hips and jerseys are tucked in.

### Proper Starting Position for Referees:



*Once a play begins, referees should not find themselves in a location where it hinders players' ability to see the field.*

# Hand Signals



## **Touchdown or Extra Point**

Extend arms straight above head to signify that a touchdown was scored or an extra-point attempt was successful.



## **Safety**

Put palms together above head to show that the defense scored a safety.





### **First Down**

When the offensive team gains enough yardage for a first down, point with right arm at shoulder length toward the defensive team's goal.



### **Fourth Down**

Raise one arm above head with hand in a closed fist to show that the offense is facing fourth down.



### **Completed Pass**

Place hands in front of face, elbows bent. Pulling elbows down, clench the hands to form fists.



### **Delay of Game**

Fold arms in front of chest.



### **False Start or Illegal Formation**

Rotate forearms repeatedly in front of body.



### **Illegal Use of Hands**

Grab one wrist and extend the open hand of that arm forward in front of chest.





### **Incomplete Pass**

Shift arms in a horizontal fashion in front of body.



### **Illegal Contact or Interference**

With open hands vertical to the ground, extend arms forward from shoulders.



### **Illegal Motion**

Flatten out hand and make a horizontal arc with it.



# Notes

A series of 25 horizontal dotted lines for taking notes.





# PRE-ANDPOST-GAMERESPONSIBILITIES

1. Arrive 30 minutes before game time
2. Inspect the field for safety hazards
3. Meet coaches and players
4. Pre-game instructions and group prayer
5. Half-time review with coaches
6. Post-game hand shake with coaches and players

## DEFENSE

PENALTY	DESCRIPTION
1. Encroachment	
2. Illegal Rush	5 Yards from the line of scrimmage; replay the down
3. Neutral Zone Infraction	
4. Offside	
5. Illegal Contact	10 Yards from the spot of the foul; automatic first down
6. Illegal Flag Pull	
7. Defensive Pass Interference	10 Yards from the line of scrimmage; automatic first down
8. Unsportsmanlike Conduct	

## OFFENSE

PENALTY	DESCRIPTION
1. Delay of Game	
2. False Start	
3. Illegal Formation	5 Yards from the line of scrimmage; replay the down
4. Illegal Motion	
5. Illegal Run	
6. Offside	
7. Intentional Grounding	5 Yards from the line of scrimmage; loss of down
8. Illegal Pass	
9. Shielding	5 Yards from spot of foul; loss of down
10. Diving	
11. Offensive Pass Interference	10 Yards from the line of scrimmage; loss of down
12. Unsportsmanlike Conduct	
13. Flag Guarding	
14. Illegal Use of Hands	10 Yards from spot of foul; loss of down
15. Offensive Charging	

