

TOURNAMENT RULEBOOK

Questions: info@hardcountathletics.com

Tournament Guidelines

- Age brackets will be as follows
 - **6U Co-Ed, 7u Co-Ed, 8U Co-Ed, 9u Co-Ed, 10U Co-Ed, 11u Co-Ed, 12U Co-Ed, 13u Co-Ed & 14U**
 - Teams participate in pool play on **Saturday Morning 1st Session**, which is for seeding purposes. All teams advance to play in single-elimination playoffs **Sunday 2nd Session**.

Coaches and Spectator Conduct/Responsibilities

- Family members, parents, and spectators are required to observe the contest from designated areas.
- Coaches are permitted to coach on the sidelines within the team box. (Exception) 6U, 7U and 8U, offensive coach allowed on field to call plays, they must be 5 yards back when ball is snapped. Defensive coach is allowed on the field of play but must be off field before ball is snapped.
- Participants, coaches, parents, and family members must conduct themselves appropriately during tournament.
- Inappropriate, rude, or confrontational behavior by a coach, player or spectator may lead to disqualification from the tournament at the sole discretion of the Tournament Officials.

Check-in and Registration

- Player Tournament Liability, Conduct Waiver, and Medical Release Waiver must be signed by a parent or legal guardian to participate.
- A copy of each player's birth certificate is required during check-in; teams will keep the copies.
- No substitutions will be allowed after the final roster is submitted.

Pool Play

- Teams will play a minimum of three games in pool play.
- Teams must start the game with a minimum of five (5) players. In the event of an injury to one player, without available substitutions, that team may play with four players on the field, but no fewer than four.
- Teams should consist of 8-12 players, maximum of 12 (5 on the field with substitutes).

Divisional Tie Breakers

- Two teams tied for one place:
 - Head to head score
 - Total points allowed during pool play

- Point differential (total points scored – total point allowed)
- Coin toss
- Three or more teams tied for one place
- Total points allowed during pool play
- Point differential (total points scored – total points allowed)
- Total points scored
- Draw for seed (1-2-3)

Playoffs and Championship

- Playoff bracket will be scheduled after pool play results are received and confirmed.
- Playoffs are single elimination.

Game Preliminaries

- At the beginning of each game the officials will inspect the uniforms and equipment of each player. A legal uniform consists of the following:
 - Jersey – All players must wear matching jerseys during the game.
 - It is the responsibility of each player to make sure that his jersey stays tucked in at all times.
 - Shorts – Only shorts with NO POCKETS are allowed.
 - Flag Belts – NFL flag belts and flags must be worn by all Players. It is the responsibility of each player to make sure that his or her flags are on their hips and pointing out prior to each play. *(Teams must supply their own flags)*
 - Mouthpiece – Each player must be properly wearing a mouthpiece while on the field.
 - Cleats – Each player must have cleats or athletic shoes. No metal spikes will be allowed.
 - Jewelry – Players are not allowed to wear any type of jewelry during the game. **Exception:** Medical Alert jewelry may be worn if taped down.
 - Gloves – Any player may wear gloves during the game. No sticky-aid is allowed. (sole discretion of officials)
 - Gamebreaker Helmets: all players will be required to wear a Gamebreaker **brand** soft shell helmet. If you do not have one, the parent must rent one when filling out the parent/guardian waiver.
- After the equipment has been checked, the team captains and coaches will meet at midfield for the coin toss. The visiting team will call the toss. The team winning the toss will either choose who will start with possession or which goal to defend. The team losing the toss will make the other choice. Both decisions will be reversed at the start of the second half.
- A team must have a minimum of five (5) players and a rostered coach present at game time. If by ten minutes after the scheduled game time the team cannot meet this minimum, the team will forfeit.
- Only one head coach and one assistant coach are allowed in the team box (on the sideline) during the game. The head coach is the only person allowed to address the officials, as well as calling time-outs.
- Mercy Rule: During pool play there will not be a mercy rule. During bracket play, mercy rule will be in effect. Any team that is 28 points or more ahead of their opponents in the second half is awarded the win. (Exception: If the team trailing by 28 points or more has possession at the start of the second half, they will be given one possession to get the score within 28.)

General Rules

- Each possession will begin with the offensive team starting with the ball on their own 5-yard line. The team will have three (3) downs to reach midfield or their opponent's end zone.
- Upon crossing midfield, the offensive team will have a first down and will then have three (3) downs to reach their opponent's end zone.
- Upon reaching their opponent's end zone, the offensive team will be awarded a touchdown.
- When the offensive team scores a touchdown, they shall choose to attempt an extra point from either the 5-yard line (1 point) or 12-yard line (2 points). The team will have one down to score.
- After the offensive team has tried for the extra point, or should the offensive team not reach midfield or the end zone after three (3) downs, their opponents will take possession on their own 5-yard line.
- All possessions will begin from the offensive team's own 5-yard line.
 - **Exception:** When an interception occurs, the possession shall start from the dead ball spot.
- To start each play, the center must snap the ball between both legs, not around the side of the body.
- At the time of the snap, only one (1) offensive player is allowed to be in motion. This motion must be parallel to or away from the line of scrimmage.
- The ball shall be spotted where the ball carrier's most planted forward in-bounds foot was at the time he came down. If the ball carrier's most planted forward foot is in his/her own end zone, the defensive team will be awarded a safety. If the ball carrier's foot is on the midfield line, the team will be awarded the first down.
- Any fumble is an immediate dead ball. When this occurs, the ball will be spotted at the first place the ball lands, when it is behind the line of scrimmage. If the ball lands in the end zone, it will be a safety.
 - **Exception:** If the ball is fumbled forward, it will be spotted at the most forward foot of the last ball carrier.
- At no point may any player intentionally kick the ball. There are no kick offs, punts, or field goals allowed.
- Each team must field exactly five (5) players for each play. All coaches and remaining players must be in the team box during each play. If a team starts the game with five (5) players and loses a player because of injury or illness, they will be allowed to continue with four (4) players. The opposing team will continue at full strength.
 - **Note:** If a team loses its fifth player to ejection, they will not be allowed to continue.
- Substitutions are unlimited and are made at the coach's discretion. Any number of substitutions may be made between plays. All exiting players must be in the team box before the ball is snapped.
- Tackling and/or blocking is illegal. No player shall at any time intentionally make contact with an opposing player. Any attempt to strip the ball from the ball carrier is also illegal.
- All players, coaches, and spectators are required to show good sportsmanship at all times. Anyone committing actions found to be unsportsmanlike will be subject to possible penalties and/or ejections.
 - **Note (1):** Any official may eject a player whose actions are deemed excessively unsportsmanlike.
 - **Note (2):** Coach and spectator ejections must be ruled on by a minimum of two (2) Tournament Officials

Passing Plays

- The quarterback (QB) shall be defined as the first player to have possession of the ball after the snap.
- From the time the ball is snapped, the QB shall have seven (7) seconds to either hand the ball off to another player or pass the ball.
- A legal pass shall be defined as a ball thrown by a player with both feet behind the line of scrimmage to a player with both feet across the line of scrimmage. Such a pass may be thrown or tossed in any manner.
- To make a legal catch, a player must attain complete possession before the ball touches the ground and must have one (1) foot or any part of their body touch completely in bounds before any part of their body touches out of bounds.
 - **Note:** Any player diving or falling to catch a pass must retain complete possession through any fall, roll, dive, etc.
- Any player may legally pass the ball provided they have not crossed the line of scrimmage at any time during the play.
- All players are eligible to receive a pass, including the QB if the ball was handed off.
 - **Exception:** The passer may not legally catch his/ own pass if deflected or blocked. Such a catch will be ruled an incomplete pass.
- There may only be one (1) forward pass on any down. For example, players may not catch a pass, run behind the line of scrimmage, and pass again.
- Any player stepping out of bounds becomes ineligible to receive a pass unless the ball is first touched by another player (not including the passer).
- Defensive players must give right of way to an offensive player running his/her pass pattern. (sole discretion of the officials).
- Interceptions are live turnovers. Any player making an interception may return the ball until down. The team will begin their possession where he/she becomes down.
 - **Exception (1):** A pass intercepted during an extra point attempt is immediately dead and cannot be returned.
 - **Exception (2):** if the ball is intercepted behind the line of scrimmage, it will be ruled an incomplete pass.
- A Completed Pass is determined when the player gains complete Control of the Ball.
- No player may spike the ball to avoid his/her flag being pulled. Such an act shall be ruled a fumble.
 - **Note:** The QB immediately snapping and spiking the ball for the sole purpose of stopping the clock during discretionary time shall not be ruled a fumble.

Running Plays

- Any player receiving a handoff is eligible to run the ball across the line of scrimmage.
 - **Exception:** The QB is never allowed to run the ball.
- Any number of handoffs is allowed on each play.
- All handoffs must occur behind the line of scrimmage.
- “No-run zones” shall be 5 yards before midfield and 5 yards before the end zone. If the ball was spotted in a “No-run zone”, no player may run the ball across the line of scrimmage, although handoffs are still allowed.
- No handoffs shall be given between the legs of a player.

The Ball Carrier

- The ball carrier is defined as any player with legal possession of the ball.
- The ball carrier is down when:

- either of his/her flags are pulled
- either of his/her flags falls off
- he/she steps or touches out of bounds
- any part of his/her body other than the foot or hand touches the ground
 - **Note:** For the purpose of this rule, If at any time the Ball touches the ground the play is considered dead.
- he/she receives a pass or handoff without both flags on
- he/she receives a pass or handoff with his jersey covering his/her flags
- his/her flag belt falls below his/her hips.
- It is the ball carrier's responsibility to avoid making contact with any defensive player with an established position on the field.
- No offensive player is allowed to run alongside the ball carrier at any time.
- Once the ball carrier is across the line of scrimmage, all offensive players must stop where they are.
 - **Note:** Offensive players may be used as a screen as long as they remain motionless. Any movement by such a screen will be deemed a block.
- The ball carrier may not jump or dive at any time.
- The ball carrier is allowed to spin, but must take a normal step between consecutive spins

Rushing the Passer

- All players who rush the passer must be a minimum of seven yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped. Any number of players can rush the quarterback.
- Once the ball is handed off, "the seven-yard rule," no longer is in effect and all the defenders may go behind the line of scrimmage.
- A special marker, or the 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.
- A legal rush is:
 - Any rush from a point of 7-yards from the defensive line of scrimmage.
 - A rush from anywhere on the field.
 - AFTER the ball has been handed off by the QB.
 - If a rusher leaves the rush line early (breaks the 7-yard mark,) they may return to the rush line, reset, and then legally rush the QB.
 - If a rusher leaves the rush line early, and the ball is handed off before he/she crosses the line of scrimmage, he/she may legally rush the QB.
- A penalty may be called if:
 - The rusher leaves the rush line before the snap crosses the line of scrimmage before a handoff or a pass.
 - Any defensive player not lined up at the rush line crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is passed or handed off.
- Special circumstances:
 - Teams are not required to rush the QB with the seven second clock in effect.
 - Teams are not required to identify their rusher before the play.
- Players rushing the QB may attempt to block the pass, however contact to the QB unless ruled incidental by the official, would result in a roughing the passer penalty.
- The offense cannot IMPEDE the rusher in any way! The rusher always has the right to a clear path to the QB, regards of where they line up prior to the snap.
- If the "path or line," is occupied by a moving offensive player, then it is the offenses responsibility to avoid the rusher.
- Any disruption to the rusher's path and/or contact will result in a impeding the rusher penalty.

- IF THE OFFENSIVE PLAYER DOES NOT MOVE AFTER THE BALL IS SNAPPED, THEN THE RUSHER HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY TO GO AROUND THE OFFENSIVE PLAYER.

Dead Balls

- The ball will be considered dead when either official blows his/her whistle. The officials shall only blow their whistles when:
 - The ball carrier is ruled down
 - The ball is fumbled
 - An incomplete pass is thrown
 - A touchdown, extra point, or safety is scored
 - Or a penalty is called that ends the play
- If at any time during a play, if either official blows his/her whistle and none of the previous has occurred, it will be ruled an inadvertent whistle.
- When an inadvertent whistle is blown, the team with possession at the time of the inadvertent whistle may elect to either replay the down or accept the result of the play had the whistle not been inadvertent.

Timing

- During Pool Play and Elimination, each game will consist of two halves with each half will be ten (10) minutes in length.
- The clock will begin running on the snap of the ball on the first play of each half. The clock will remain running at all times, stopping only:
 - During a team timeout
 - During an official's timeout
 - During a coach's challenge
 - At the two-minute warning in the second half
 - When required during discretionary time.
- Every play, once the ball is spotted, one of the officials will mark the rush line.
- Once the rush line is marked, the time-keeping official will blow a ready-whistle.
- The offensive team will then have thirty (30) seconds to snap the ball.
- The offensive team must not snap the ball before the ready whistle is blown.
- Each team will have one timeout per half. Each timeout will be 30 seconds in length.
- If at the end of regulation time the scores are tied, the teams will go into overtime.

Overtime

- Pool Play
 - No Overtime in Pool Play
- Bracket Play
 - If after one possession each the teams are still tied, first possession will alternate, and the process is repeated.
 - **Note:** In the second overtime or later, teams must attempt a two-point conversion after scoring a touchdown.

Penalties

- Game officials shall have sole authority on calling all penalties.
 - The head official on the game will have the right to overrule a penalty called by any other official(s).

Offensive Penalties and Their Definitions

- Offsides
 - Any player standing on or over the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.
- False Start
 - Any player, after becoming set, making any motion towards the line of scrimmage prior to the snap of the ball; the center making any movement simulating a snap without completing the snap.
 - **Note:** It is not a false start for the QB to not take the ball immediately from the center. A false start shall not be called on the center until he makes movement to put the ball back down.
- Illegal Shift
 - Having two or more players in motion at the time of the snap.
 - **Note:** Players not set for a full second prior to the snap will be considered in motion for the purpose of this rule.
- Blocking
 - Any player making a movement to intentionally deter a defender from reaching the ball carrier.
- Illegal Contact
 - Any player intentionally initiating contact with a defender; a ball carrier not avoiding a planted defender.
- Illegal Run
 - A ball carrier running the ball across the line of scrimmage when the ball was snapped from the no-run zone; any attempted pitch or lateral.
- 7-Second Violation
 - The QB failing to pass or handoff the ball within seven (7) seconds of the snap.
- Delay of Game
 - Failing to snap the ball within thirty (30) seconds of the official blowing the ready whistle; snapping the ball before the ready whistle.
- Flag Guarding
 - A ball carrier using his/her hands/arms to prevent his/her flag from being pulled; a ball carrier jumping or diving to advance the ball.
 - Any offensive player running with the ball carrier once he/she is across the line of scrimmage.
 - If a ball carrier flag guards in his/her own end zone, it is a safety.
- Illegal Forward Pass
 - Any player throwing a pass from over the line of scrimmage; any player catching a pass behind the line of scrimmage.
- Pass Interference
 - Any player making contact with a defender attempting a catch without being in the action of attempting a catch himself; pushing off of a defender to make a catch.
- Unsportsmanlike Conduct
 - Any player, coach, or spectator committing any action deemed to be unsportsmanlike.
 - This includes but is not limited to foul language, spiking the ball, inciting violence, trash talk, or arguing with officials.

Defensive Penalties and Their Definition Offside

- Any player standing on or over the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.
- **Illegal Rush**
 - Any player not behind the rush line at the time of the snap that crosses the line of scrimmage before a handoff; any rusher jumping once across the line of scrimmage; any rusher yelling or screaming at the passer.
- **Illegal Contact –**
 - Any player intentionally initiating contact with an offensive player; moving directly into the path of the ball carrier and making contact with him.
- **Holding**
 - Any player grabbing the jersey or uniform of an offensive player; any player making contact with the ball carrier hindering his forward progress.
- **Pass Interference**
 - Any player making contact with a receiver attempting a catch without being in the action of attempting a catch himself; any player not giving right of way to a receiver running his route.
- **Illegal Flag Pull**
 - Pulling the flag of an offensive player before he makes contact with the ball; any player leaving the ground in an attempt to pull a flag.
- **Roughing the Passer**
 - Any rusher making ANY contact with the passer, regardless of intent.
- **Unsportsmanlike Conduct**
 - Any player, coach, or spectator committing any action deemed to be unsportsmanlike.
 - This includes but is not limited to spiking the flag of an opponent, inciting violence, trash talk, or arguing with officials.

Defense

- Infraction Marked from Assessment
 - Offside, Scrimmage, 5 Yards + First Down, Pass Interference (If penalty occurs in the end zone, the ball will be placed on the 1-yard line), Spot Foul, Automatic First Down, Illegal Flag Pull, Spot Foul, 5 Yards + First Down, Illegal Rush, Scrimmage, 5 Yards + First Down, Illegal Contact (Initiating), Scrimmage, 5 Yards + First Down, Holding on a Ball Carrier, Spot Foul, 5 Yards + First Down, Stripping or Tackling, Spot Foul, 5 Yards + First Down, Roughing the Passer, Scrimmage, 15 yards + First Down, Unsportsmanlike Conduct, Scrimmage, 15 yards + First Down, Illegal Play, Scrimmage, 5 yards + First Down
- **If an illegal flag pull, holding, stripping or tackling is called on the last defender, a touchdown is awarded.**

Offense

- Infraction Marked from Assessment
 - Delay of Game, Scrimmage, 5 Yards + Loss of Down, 7 Second Violation, Deal Ball, Consumes Down, Offside / False Start, Scrimmage, 5 Yards + Loss of Down, Illegal Motion, Scrimmage, 5 Yards + Loss of Down, Illegal Play, Scrimmage, 5 Yards + Loss of Down, Illegal Forward Pass, Scrimmage, 5 Yards + Loss of Down, Illegal Contact, Holding or bumping a defender, not avoiding contact, blocking etc., Scrimmage, 5 Yards + Loss of Down, Pass Interference, Scrimmage, 5 Yards + Loss of Down, Flag Guarding, Stiff arm, holding the flag,

- slapping a hand away, diving or jumping, etc., Spot Foul, 5 Yards + Loss of Down, Unsportsmanlike Conduct, Scrimmage, 15 Yards + Loss of Down
- Unsportsmanlike Conduct fouls may result in team warnings and or player/coach ejections.
 - **Examples:** Use of vulgar language, trash talking, tackling, or intentional rough play.
- Incidental contact resulting from the normal running of a play is a judgment call and will be determined by the referees.
- Players cannot dive for a first down or TD.
- Any play not covered in the rulebook is subject to be penalized as an Illegal Play.
- Any offensive penalty that occurs IN the End Zone is a safety.
- The opposing team, with the exception of a dead ball foul, can decline any penalty.
- On any play in which both teams commit a penalty; the down will be replayed from the previous line of scrimmage.
- On any play which there is more than one penalty on one team, the opposing team may only choose to accept one penalty.
 - **Exception:** If one of the penalties is Unsportsmanlike Conduct, the team may accept both penalties.
- A half cannot end on a play in which the defensive team was penalized, unless the offense declines the penalty. The offensive team will have one un-timed down. After this down, the half is over.
- Any penalties occurring during a dead ball will be assessed from the dead ball spot. If the dead ball penalty follows a touchdown, the team will have the choice to take the penalty on the extra point attempt or on the ensuing possession.
- No penalty shall take a team more than half the distance towards their own goal line.
 - **Exception:** Defensive Pass Interference will place the ball at the spot of the foul.
- All offensive penalties will be an immediate dead ball.
 - **Exception:** Illegal Forward Pass and Pass Interference penalties shall not be blown dead until the defense has no further chance to intercept the ball.
- Any player or coach receiving a second Unsportsmanlike Conduct penalty in a game will be immediately ejected. An Unsportsmanlike Conduct penalty called on a team's sideline may be placed on the head coach at the officials' discretion.

Scoring

- The games will be scored as follows:
 - Touchdown – 6 points
 - Extra Point from 5-yard line – 1 point
 - Extra Point from 12-yard line – 2 points
 - Safety – 2 points
 - Overtime Win – 1 point

Coach's Challenge

- If a team has no timeouts remaining, they will **not** be allowed to challenge.
- After any play, the head coach of a team may ask for the referee coordinator to make a rule Clarification if he believes the head official's clarification to be incorrect.
- If the ruling on the field is upheld, the challenging team will be charged a timeout. If the ruling is overturned, no timeout will be charged.
- Challenges can only be made for a rule clarification. Challenges on the judgment of the officials will not be allowed.