



# HC Flag Football Manual

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## WELCOME!

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Welcome to the Flag Football Season! We look forward to, through our dedicated volunteers and referees, provide a great spring season. Our coaches have and continue to be great people interested in making sure our children get a golden opportunity to experience sports at its best. The parents and players show outstanding sportsmanship and just love the opportunity to enjoy the sport and be part of a great team, winning season or not. Spending a Saturday out on the field is just plain fun!

The programs intent is to provide play with and against participants of similar age and experience. It is the philosophy of the program to teach participants the necessary skills to love the game of football; as such it is important to provide comparable playing time for all participants. The League's mission is to provide children with the opportunity to have a positive football experience incorporating core values of self-esteem, learning, fun and sportsmanship. It is very important that everyone realize that like any sport practice, good sportsmanship, and some honest sweat is needed to make this work. While we do not require equal play, we do want all players to have an opportunity to play both sides of the ball and to learn all positions. Discuss with your coach their philosophy of how they determine play selection and if you have a concern contact me or the Site Manager immediately.

This handbook was developed to help our league members understand how the program operates and what is expected of all coaches, players and parents. While we can't cover every contingency in this handbook, do ask you to follow the spirit of what is outlined here, and allow common sense to prevail.

Sincerely,

Adam Zuckerman  
Sports Program Supervisor  
Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks  
azuckerman@howardcountymd.gov

## Inclement Weather

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**It will be up to the coach's discretion to cancel or hold practice if it rains. Coaches or their team parent will inform all parents if they cancel practice.** While games and practice may be held during mild rain, as a matter of safety and precaution, all activities must come to a stop upon the first sound of thunder or sight of lightning. Activities may be resumed no sooner than 30 minutes after the last sound of thunder or sight of lightning.

In the event of inclement weather, the county has established a voice mailbox to service our participants. No team is to practice or play on a closed facility.

**The status line listed below will be updated Sat-Sun after 7:30am for games. No further updates will be made unless specified. We will not update if a sudden storm comes in, policy is that you can't play in thunderstorms or lightning.**

**Hollifield is Recreation and Park fields and therefore you should not call the schools weather line.**

### Inclement Weather Numbers

HCRP Program Status Line Game Day only 410-313-4457

## Participant Information Forms

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Each child is required to have a participant information form that is signed before they can begin practice. Participants will not be able to participate in the program if this form is not turned in to their coach upon their first practice. The form is provided to each participant or can be downloaded from the Recreation and Parks website:

[www.howardcountymd.gov/rap](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/rap)

## Children with Special Needs

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The Department of Recreation and Parks is pleased to comply with the American with Disabilities Act (A.D.A.) Regulations. Individuals with disabilities are encouraged to register for recreation programs. With your registration, please include information regarding your child's disability and any accommodations that are needed. The Department may provide an Inclusion Companion upon a parent's request. For additional services, please contact, the Therapeutic Recreation and Inclusion Supervisor at (410) 313-4628.

## Sportsmanship

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*As a Parent/Guardian*, I recognize that parents/guardians are the most important role models for their children, and that sports help to develop a sense of teamwork, self-worth, and sportsmanship. I understand that while on the field my child needs to listen and abide by the rules and policies of Howard County Recreation and Parks and his coach. As such, I agree to abide by the following:

Encourage good sportsmanship by demonstrating positive support for all players, coaches, fans and officials at games, practices and other sporting events.

Place the wellbeing of my child and the other children on the field before a personal desire to win.

Advocate a sports environment for children that is free of drugs, tobacco, alcohol and abusive language, and refrain from their use during youth sporting events.

Encourage my child to play by the rules and respect the rights of other players, coaches, fans and officials.

Discuss concerns with coach professionally, before or after game/practice not during.

\* Parents and siblings will not be on the playing field while child is practicing/game. Stay in parent designated area. Ask the coach if you're not sure where to be located. Contact coach, Site Manager, or Sports Supervisor before or after game if you have a concern or question. Please do not bring pets to field, it is a safety hazard to our players and spectators.

## Mid-Atlantic Recreation & Parks Sports Alliance

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The Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks is a member of the Mid-Atlantic Recreation & Parks Sports Alliance. The Alliance is comprised of more than thirty Recreation & Parks departments and sports organizations. The mission of the Mid-Atlantic Recreation & Parks Sports Alliance is to develop and communicate a consistent message that organizations and their players, coaches and spectators will be held accountable to a code of conduct that promotes sportsmanship and keeps recreational competitive and non-competitive sporting activities in proper perspective. Therefore, parents must be aware that non-compliance with sportsmanship rules will lead to consequences which can include suspension from volunteering; or attending program sites.

## Possible Practice & Playing Fields

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**HOLLIFIELD STATION ELEMENTARY** – 8701 Stonehouse Drive, Ellicott City, MD 21043.

Route 29 North to the dead end at Route 99. Right onto Route 99 then left at the first stoplight (Stonehouse Drive) and take the first left into the school.

**CRADELROCK ELEMENTARY** - 6700 Cradlerock Way, Columbia, MD 21045.

Route 29 to Exit 18 Brokenland Parkway (toward Owen Brown). Left onto Cradlerock Way. The school is on the right field is to the left of school.

**DAYTON OAKS ELEMENTARY** - 4691 Ten Oaks Road, Dayton, MD 21036

Take 108 west towards Clarksville. Turn right at Homewood Road. Follow Homewood Road, which becomes Folly Quarter Road at Sheppard Lane. Continue on Folly Quarter Road (west) for about 6 miles. Enter traffic circle, and merge right at third exit, which is Ten Oaks Road. Follow Ten Oaks Road for about 1.5 miles. The school is on the left.

**EAST COLUMBIA LIBRARY/SENIOR CENTER – 6600 CRADLEROCK WAY, COLUMBIA, MD 21045.**

Route 29 South to Exit 18 Brokenland Parkway (toward Owen Brown). Left at second traffic light onto Cradlerock Way. Library/Senior Center is on the right approximately 3/10 mile (both occupy the same building). Field is directly across from school.

**LAKE ELKHORN MIDDLE SCHOOL – 6700 Cradlerock Way, Columbia, MD 21045.**

Route 29 to Exit 18 Brokenland Parkway (toward Owen Brown). Left onto Cradlerock Way. The school is on the right field is to the right of school.

## **PARKING/FACILITIES & RESTROOMS**

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We ask that parents, coaches, and referees park cars in the specified parking areas, in the schools parking lot. There is parking on the far left of the school. Do not park on walkways or pavements of the facility. At Hollifield please do not park close to curb areas, emergency vehicles need a throughway. Please do not to park in front of houses or in Fire Lanes. Cars parked in fire lanes will be subject to ticketing and towing. **Do not park in the housing area**. Remember that many children are running around during practice and games. Drive the appropriate speed in parking lots and watch for children. Many sports programs in Howard County request the use of our sports fields and facilities. Please help us to continue to be able to use our beautiful facilities. Home teams are responsible for the maintenance of their home field to include trash disposal. ***We ask parents and visitors to help us keep our facilities clean and safe. Dispose of water bottles and leftovers in the garbage bins provided.*** Look around and ensure that you take equipment, papers, and clothing home with you. Please monitor all siblings of participants to ensure their safety. Children should not be running around the fields/area unsupervised. Please supervise any children that go to the playground.

## **Flag Football League Rules**

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### **ROSTERS**

All players must be registered through the Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks. Any player not registered will not be allowed to participate in the league in any capacity. All participants must complete a county participation form. All participants must wear a mouthpiece to practice and games; and have the game jersey/shirt to play in games unless waived by the Sports Supervisor.

### **SPORTSMANSHIP**

1. **FOUL PLAY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.** If the referee witnesses any acts of tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, blocking or any unsportsmanlike act, the game will be stopped, and the player may be ejected, or a penalty may be given.
2. There will be **NO** offensive language or “trash talk” by players, parents, or coaches. Officials have the right to determine offensive language. Coaches may be ejected after referee gives a warning. Referees will notify the Sports Supervisor within 24 hours of any foul language by a coach. Coaches will do the same in reference to referees’ language.
3. **Parents and assistant coaches may not address the referees.** If you have a question or comment about a call speak with your coach after the game. Only the head coach or his designee for the day may talk to refs. Unsportsmanlike penalty will be called by the ref for this violation.

4. There will be NO blocking or tackling. First offense will result in 10 (ten) yards and first down or loss of down depending on offensive or defensive foul. Second offense will be temporary ejection from game until referee calls player back in. Continued offenses could result in game suspensions or termination from the league. Coaches are asked to realize that plays should not be designed to escort players down the field.

#### **EQUIPMENT:**

1. Age 5-6 Mini-ball
2. Age 7-8 K-2 ball
3. Age 9-11 TDJ ball
4. Age 12-14 TDY

**Home team will provide the game ball at referee's approval. Teams may exchange balls at possession.**

Substitution will be required for any equipment issues (fixing) unless the team has only five (5) players. This includes belt mishap, tucking in shirts, missing/dropped mouth pieces, etc.

#### **PLAYING RULES (FOLLOWS NFL FLAG RULES UNLESS CHANGED IN THIS SOP)**

1. Home team gets first offense possession. Visitor chooses the end zone it would prefer to defend. Teams change sides after the first half. Possession changes.
2. Games are 5 vs 5, except as determined by County, if most teams have more than 11 players.
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. All possession changes, except interceptions, start on the offenses 5 (five) yard line. Interceptions may be returned (except as noted in paragraph 16).
5. The game will consist of 2 (two) 25 (twenty-five) minute halves with a running clock and a two-minute halftime. There will be one 30 (thirty) second and one 60 (sixty) second timeout per team each half.
6. Teams change sides after the first twenty-five minutes and possession change changes to the loser of the coin toss unless deferred.
7. Games are played to 50 (fifty) minutes running time. **Referee** and coaches must end games timely.
8. Each team will have 30 (thirty) seconds to snap the ball. Teams will receive one warning before a delay of game penalty is enforced.
9. Officials can stop the clock at their discretion.
10. Mouth guards ARE required. NO player will be allowed to play without it. Players must wear team Jersey for games.
11. Cleats are allowed but NO metal spikes will be permitted.
12. A player may not dive or jump to either pull a flag or advance the ball on offense.
13. Once the ball is passed or handed off, all other offensive players must make an attempt to move away from the ball carrier.
14. **Only one coach is allowed on the field at any time (except if acting as a ref).** The coach may provide a play and line the players up correctly. After the players are lined up, the coach must move either out of the playing area or to the sideline. No other coach or parent may be on the field, for any reason (including to provide water). If a player needs water, substitute him/her and continue game. ALL balls that hit the ground are dead. No more than 3 coaches/team parent on sideline.

15. Interceptions during the extra point is not returned. Ball changes possession and new offense takes over on its 5 (five) yard line.
16. Huddles should last no more than 30 seconds (except for 5-6 the first two weeks). Referees will call delay of game. Referee will blow whistle and start clock at end of 30 seconds. Team has 30 seconds at that point to snap ball,

## **RUNNING**

1. The quarterback cannot run with the ball. The quarterback is the offensive player who receives the snap.
2. Only direct handoffs behind the line of scrimmage are permitted. (Note that shotgun is allowed for teams of 7-9 and above). Once he/she hands off, multiple handoffs may occur, but all must take place behind the line of scrimmage. The player who takes the handoff can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage.
3. **Center sneaks are not allowed. The QB cannot handoff to the center on the first handoff of the play.**
4. The shotgun is legal for **ages 7-9 and above only**.
5. The quarterback may run the ball if he has received the snap from the center, then completely handed off to another player and through some type of play (reverse etc.), another RB hands it off to the QB. **It cannot be that the QB hands off so that contact is made with the RB's hand but is immediately withdrawn and the QB runs (i.e. similar to above).**
6. Absolutely NO laterals of any kind. Shovel passes are allowed but must be received beyond the line of scrimmage.
7. The player who takes the handoff can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage.
8. Once the ball has been handed off, all defensive players are eligible to rush. "No running zones" are located five yards from each end zone and five yards on either side of midfield, they are designed to avoid short-yardage, power running.
9. Spinning is allowed, but player can't leave their feet to avoid a defense player. No diving. Spinning out of control will be called for flag guarding.
10. The ball is spotted where the ball carrier's feet are when the flag is pulled, not where the ball is.
11. No running with the ball-carrier.

## **RECEIVING**

1. All players are eligible to receive passes. This includes 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.
3. A player must have at least one foot inbounds when making a reception.
4. In cases of simultaneous possession by both offensive and defensive player, possession is the offense.

## **PASSING**

1. All passes must be forward and received beyond the line of scrimmage. A pass cannot be sent backwards.
2. Shovel passes are allowed but must be received beyond the line of scrimmage.
3. All snaps must be taken with the quarterback under the center, except as noted in paragraph on Running (#4).
4. The quarterback has a 7 (seven) second pass clock. If a pass is not thrown within the 7 (seven) seconds, play is dead and loss of down. Once the ball is handed off, the 7 (seven) second rule is no longer in effect.
5. Interceptions may be returned except during extra point plays.

## **DEADBALLS**

1. The ball must be snapped between the legs, not off to one side to start play. **\*\*Exception is allowed in the 5-6-year-old league or if in the co-ed league there is a female/male combination as center/quarterback.**
2. Substitutions may be made on any dead ball.
3. Play is ruled "dead" when any of the following occur:
  - Ball carriers' flag is pulled
  - Ball carrier steps out of bounds
  - Touchdown or safety is scored.
  - Ball carriers knee hits the ground.
  - Ball carriers flag falls out.

**\*\*\*There are no fumbles. The ball is spotted where the ball carriers' feet were at the time of the fumble.\*\*\***

## **RUSHING THE QUARTERBACK**

All players who rush the passer must be a minimum of 7 (seven) yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped. Any number of players can rush the quarterback. Players not rushing the quarterback may defend on the line of scrimmage. Referees need to mark off area each play. Players should be going for the flag not the quarterback's arm or the ball. If a player hits the quarterback (even on accident) or has their hands in his or her face they will be called for a penalty.

Once the ball is handed off, the 7 (seven) yard rule no longer is in effect, and all defenders may go behind the line of scrimmage. A special marker, or the referee will designate 7 (seven) yards from the line of scrimmage. No blocking or tackling allowed! Players may rush as soon as ball is moved.

If the defense team is rushing and the offensive team is positioned so that they impeded the defense from getting to or finding the ball carrier, it will be considered screening and a penalty will be called.

## **SCORING**

Touchdown: 6 (six) points

Extra point: 1 (one) point (played from 5 (five) -yard line) or 2 (two) points (played from 12 (twelve) -yard line)

Safety: 2 (two) points

The one-point play is done on the no running zone; therefore, there should not be a running play. The two-point play is done from the 12-yard line, and therefore is the coach's discretion on the play.

**Extra Point:** Defensive penalty: Retry the attempt half the distance to the goal.

Offensive penalty: loss of attempt.

## **PENALTIES**

\*The referee will call ALL penalties (warning may be given for first time offense with younger players). Once a penalty is called refs **must** use the below penalties. There is no option to decline a penalty except if it allows the opponent a change in the no run zone or a score.

UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT-15 (fifteen) yard penalty, and automatic first down or loss of down depending on the side occurred. This is for incidents involving player, coach, or spectator.

### **i. General**

1. The referee will call all penalties.
2. Referees determine incidental contact that may result from normal run of play. Most contact will be called even when accidental.
3. **All penalties will be assessed as noted. (Spot fouls)**
4. Only the team captain or head coach may ask the referee questions about rule clarification and interpretations. Players cannot question judgment calls.
5. Games cannot end on a defensive penalty unless the offense declines it.
6. Penalties are assessed Live Ball then Dead Ball. Live Ball penalties must be assessed before play is considered complete.
7. Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal yardage when the penalty yardage is more than half the distance to the goal

### **Flag Guarding**

– an act by the ball carrier to prevent a defender from pulling the ball carrier's flags by stiff arm, jumping to avoid a flag pull, lowering hand, elbow, or head or by blocking access to the runner's flags with a hand or arm.

### **Rushing the QB**

Defender blocking the pass

They need to go for the flag and not the ball

Any contact with the QB is roughing the passer/unnecessary roughness (penalty assessed from LOS)

Impedance of the rusher

The rusher has a clear path to the QB and any interference by the offense to impede his/her path will be considered screening.

However, if the center snaps the ball and doesn't move from their spot, the rusher must go around him and will not be consider impeding or blocking.

**Illegal contact**

Gripping the jersey/shorts or pants to slow down the ball carrier

10yd penalty & first down for the offense

**Equipment issues that stop play**

Untucked jerseys or excess belts hanging out

Will be called flag guarding when player is carrying the ball

There have been too many incidents where fixing untucked jerseys/excess belts take up play time for the kids b/c the coach doesn't want to substitute players out.

This will apply to mouth pieces also.

Players must be substituted out for at least a play unless the team doesn't have more than 5 players.

**Inadvertent whistle**

In the case of an inadvertent whistle, the offense has two options:

A) Take the ball where the whistle blew.

B) Replay the down from the original line of scrimmage.

**Things re-emphasized**

The ball is spotted where the runner's feet are when the flag is pulled, ***not where the ball is.***

There are no fumbles. The ball is spotted where the ***player losses possession. (Again, where his feet are)***

**ii. Defensive spot fouls**

Defensive pass interference	Automatic first down
Holding	+5 Automatic first down
Stripping	+10 yards and automatic first down

**iii. Offensive spot fouls**

Screening, blocking or running with the ball	-10 yards and loss of down
Charging	-10 yards and loss of down
Flag guarding	-10 yards and loss of down

**iv. Defensive penalties**

Defensive unnecessary roughness	+10 yards and automatic first down
Defensive Unsportsmanlike conduct	+15 yards and automatic first down
Offside	+5 yards from line of scrimmage 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

**v. Offensive penalties**

Offensive unnecessary roughness	-10 yards and loss of down
Offensive unsportsmanlike conduct	-15 yards and loss of down
Offside/ false start	-5 yards from line of scrimmage 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

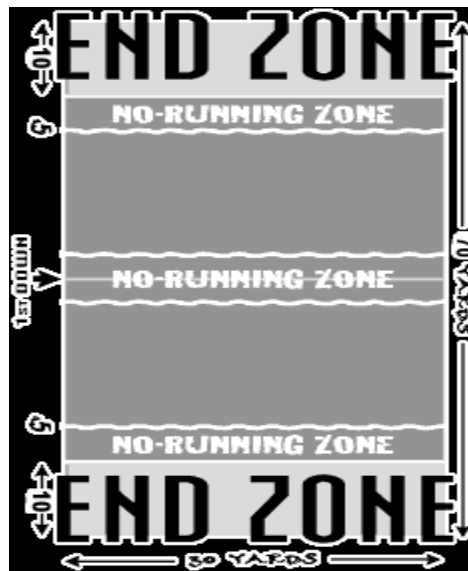
Offensive pass interference	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Illegal motion (More than one person moving)	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Delay of game	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Impeding the rusher	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Illegal Procedure	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down

**GENERAL PENALTY INFORMATION**

Referees determine incidental contact that may result from normal run of play. Therefore, if the referee determines for instances that an offside move by a player was incidental and did not impact the play, he may elect not to call it. All penalties will be assessed from the line of scrimmage.

Once the referee makes a call, the coach may ask for an interpretation but may not argue with the referee about a call. If the call involved a ruling (not a judgment call) the coach should contact the Sports Supervisor the following Monday for a final interpretation of the rule.

If the referee calls the ball dead mistakenly for a pulled flag and the flag was not pulled the play is down at the spot and the offensive team does not lose a down.



**\*Please note that the field size is 30 x 70 for all ages. FIELD DIAGRAM**

The “NO RUN ZONES” on the field diagram. These are painted on all flag fields. **Any play STARTED on/within this zone MUST be a PASS. This includes EXTRA POINTS.** You may begin a RUNNING play outside of this zone and run THROUGH the zone.

<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</b>	(LOS) 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>Downs (1-2-3)</b>	The offensive team has three attempts or “downs” to advance the ball. It must cross the line to gain to get another set of downs or to score.
<b>Live Ball</b>	Refers to the period that the play is in action. Generally used regarding 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 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 or arm.
<b>Shovel Pass</b>	A legal pitch attempted beyond the line of scrimmage.
<b>Lateral</b>	A backward or sideways toss of the ball by the ball-carrier.
<b>Unsportsmanlike Conduct</b>	A rude, confrontational, or offensive behavior or language.