



Men's Flag Football League Rulebook and General Information

Purpose and Scope of This Document

This Rulebook and Registration Information booklet is intended to give all participants a broad overview of how the league operates and explain most rules and procedures that govern the league. This document is not intended to cover every last detail, such as schedules for each team, and various other procedural and administrative items. Many additional details for the league will be disseminated via e-mail and on the Club website, so please check both frequently. If you have a SPAM filter on your e-mail, please add patrick@madisonssc.com to your list of safe senders to ensure you receive all e-mails pertaining to the league. This is the only e-mail address from which e-mails regarding the league will come.

Welcome

This document contains a wealth of information about how our league works as well as registration information. All participants must complete a Waiver to be eligible to play in our league. There are absolutely no exceptions to this rule. **PLEASE READ THIS DOCUMENT IN ITS ENTIRETY BEFORE YOUR FIRST GAME TO ENSURE YOU FULLY UNDERSTAND THE RULES AND PROCEDURES WHICH GOVERN THE LEAGUE.**

Code of Conduct

The Madison Sports and Social Club does not tolerate discrimination, racism, violence, threats, or any other type of behavior that may in any way make any member feel uncomfortable or threaten his health and well-being. We expect all members to treat each other with respect and abide by common rules of decency and good sportsmanship.

Team names must not be offensive toward any race, nationality, gender, or any other group of individuals. They must also not contain profanity. Please use tact and common sense when choosing a team name. MSSC reserves the right to reject any team name it finds offensive. You will be asked to supply a new name in the event your team name is deemed inappropriate.

During play, all participants must refrain from taunting, name-calling, put-downs, intimidation, and violence toward teammates and opponents. Everyone makes mistakes, and we will not tolerate criticism or intimidation of any of our members due to differences in skill level or any other factor. Coaching, tips, and helpful hints are welcome, provided they are relayed in a constructive and friendly manner.

All members are encouraged to report offensive behavior to the Club President, Patrick Fosdick, via e-mail at patrick@madisonssc.com. All reports will be kept anonymous and taken seriously, and appropriate action will be taken if deemed necessary, including, but not limited to warnings, suspension and removal of the offending individual from the league.

Team Shirts

MSSC provides shirts for all teams. Captains select their top three color choices during registration. Returning teams get first choice at colors if they wish to use the same color as previous seasons. If there is a team made up entirely of Free Agents, players will have to agree on one color.

Structure of the League

All captains will be asked to classify their teams as “Rec” or “Competitive.” If there are enough teams who classify themselves as rec or competitive, there will be separate divisions. If not, all teams will be placed into one division. Playoffs may be segmented into separate divisions based on final regular season records even if there is only one division for the regular season.

Prizes and Payouts

The league champion for each night will receive MSSC Champions t-shirts. The following payouts will also be awarded:

Champion	\$75
Runner-up	\$25

Prizes are subject to change at MSSC discretion. In seasons where we are able to have separate divisions, prizes will only be awarded in the Competitive division.

Miscellaneous Administrative Rules and Notes

- MSSC encourages Free Agents (or players without a team) to register. Full teams will be placed first, followed by Free Agents in the order they registered.
- Free Agents are welcome to form teams on their own or request to play with friends, otherwise they will be assigned to a team by MSSC.
- Spectators are welcome and encouraged at the games.
- Club management reserves the right to alter the setup of the league (including rules) at any time before or during the season.
- Referees are provided by MSSC and should have no affiliation with any particular team in the league. If it becomes apparent that a referee is favoring one team over another on a consistent basis, he will be dismissed and another referee will take his place.
- Teams must maintain complete and accurate rosters. All players, including subs, should be listed on a team’s roster, and players who play in any number of games must complete the waiver, which is accomplished through accepting a spot on the team from a captain’s e-mail invite. Teams in violation of waiver policies will be subject to forfeiting games at MSSC’s discretion
- Following the regular season, an appropriate playoff structure will be established. In general, all teams make the playoffs with the following exceptions:
 - Any team forfeiting two or more regular season games may be left out of the playoffs at MSSC’s discretion

- If time or space constraints arise, teams may be left out of the playoffs to allow completion of the league in a timely and/or efficient manner. Depending on the reason for the exclusion, a team may be refunded for a playoff game
- Any team determined to have exhibited extremely poor sportsmanship or other conduct detrimental to the league on a regular and consistent basis may be left out of the playoffs at MSSC's discretion. Refunds will NOT be issued to any teams under these circumstances, as this is a violation of our Code of Conduct
- Any team who does not wish to participate in the playoffs may be excluded at the captain's request. There is no requirement to participate in the playoffs

Game Equipment

Teams supply their own footballs to be used while on offense. MSSC may or may not have a supply of "lost and found" balls on hand that teams can use if they wish. NERF or foam footballs, toy footballs, and significantly undersized footballs are not allowed. Balls must be NCAA size or larger. Referees or a representative of MSSC will have final discretion as to whether any particular ball is allowable.

Flag belts will be provided by MSSC. They will be issued by the referee or a representative of MSSC shortly before the beginning of each game. All participants must wear the team t-shirts issued by MSSC for each game. It is the responsibility of each participant to ensure that he brings the t-shirt to each game. Subs must at least wear a shirt that is similar in color to the team shirts to avoid confusion. MSSC has the right to require a team to wear mesh pinnies in the event that team colors are too similar during any matchup, or a team is not wearing their MSSC shirts.

The referee or a representative of MSSC may inspect attire worn by all participants before each game and will instruct players to remove any items that are not allowed on the field of play.

THE FOLLOWING ITEMS ARE PROHIBITED ON THE FIELD AT ALL TIMES WITH NO EXCEPTIONS:

- Metals cleats
- Jewelry of any kind (watches, rings, necklaces, earrings, bracelets, etc) that is too loose, sharp, or dangerous to any player
- Helmets or headwear containing a hard or unyielding surface
- Pants with belts or belt loops
- Any other item(s) the referee or representative of MSSC may deem inappropriate or dangerous to other participants

The Playing Field

Field boundaries will be marked by lines painted on the ground. Orange pylons will also be placed in the corner of each end zone, the middle of the back of the end zone, and at mid-field to serve as reference points. Fields are generally approximately 30 yards wide by 67 yards long, but may be smaller if space limitations apply.

Team Composition

Each team should have 6 players on the field during play (a “full team”). Teams may have as many players on their roster as they wish, as long as each individual has completed the Waiver. Teams are welcome to use subs at any time during the regular season provided the sub fills out the Waiver. A team’s “own sub” is defined as a player who does not appear on the roster of another team.

Subs: Teams may use anyone they want if they are short players with a few exceptions:

- Referees are not allowed to play for any team in the league, and teams are prohibited from recruiting a referee to join their team
- A team must furnish at least four of its own players to field a legal team, and must have at least four of its own players on the field at all times. A team’s “own player” is defined as anyone NOT on the roster of another MSSC men’s league team of the same night
- League players may not sub for other teams in the playoffs

Forfeiture

Teams will have until 5 minutes past the designated start time to field a legal team. A “legal team” must have a minimum of 5 players. Teams fielding less than 5 players will forfeit the game. **Exception:** Teams may play with less than 5 players with the opposing team’s consent. Teams who agree to play under these conditions will lose the option of receiving a forfeit win. The opponent may play with 6 players regardless of how many players are fielded by the shorthanded team.

Beginning of the Game

The “home” team gets to call the coin toss. The winner of the toss may choose offense/defense first or which goal they will defend first. The loser of the coin toss may pick their team’s preference for whichever option was not selected by the team winning the coin toss. There are no kick-offs; play starts 5 yards from the opposing goal line.

Length of the Game, Timekeeping, and Timeouts

Play will be divided into two 20 minute halves with a five minute halftime. The clock runs continuously until the 2:00 warning and does not stop after touchdowns or extra point attempts until the 2:00 warning. Teams will switch direction at the start of the second half. The team that started the game on defense will start the second half on offense. Each team is allowed two 60 second timeouts per game that may be used at any time. During the final 2:00 of each half, the referee shall stop the game clock if:

- an incomplete pass is thrown (this includes intentional grounding)
- a player ends a play by going out of bounds
- either team scores (the clock will remain off until the opposing team snaps the ball after the PAT attempt; the clock does not run during extra points)

- change of possession occurs
- a penalty occurs
- a team calls a time out

The game time will be kept by one referee. Players from either team may ask the referee for the time remaining after the completion of any given play. The play clock will be kept by the second referee.

The clock will not stop for the 2:00 warning unless there is a dead ball situation when the clock hits 2:00. For example, play will not be stopped at 2:00 if one team is in the middle of a play. The referee will announce that 2:00 remain in the game, and the clock will stop once the play is complete. If a team is up by 20 or more points in either half, the clock runs continuously during the last two minutes of play.

The offensive team has 25 seconds to snap the ball once it has been spotted. The offense is responsible for returning the ball to the line of scrimmage. A referee is responsible for monitoring the time; there will be no visible play clock. The referee should begin a verbal countdown when a team has ten seconds left to snap the ball.

Mercy Rule: To keep scores from getting out of hand and keep games running on schedule, a mercy rule may be implemented as follows: If a team is up by 20 or more points and it has reached the time for the next game to begin, the game may be called

Scoring and Rules During Play

Scoring - Teams are awarded 6 points for a touchdown.

Extra points will not be kicked, but rather will take the form of a 2 point conversion where players must run or pass the ball into the end zone. An extra point initiated 5 yards off the goal line is worth 1 point. An extra point initiated 10 yards from the goal line is worth 2 points. Extra point attempts may be intercepted and returned for the attempted number of points, and the intercepting team will continue on offense, starting at their 5 yard line. Games ending in a tie score will be recorded as tie games during regular season play. During the playoffs there will be no ties; please refer to the “Playoffs” section of this document for overtime rules during the playoffs.

Safeties - A safety will be awarded if a ball carrier:

- Is downed in his own end zone by having his flag removed
- Runs out of bounds in his own end zone
- Is not able to cleanly catch a snap that subsequently rolls out of the end zone
- Fumbles the ball in the end zone (exception: turnover rule for snaps covered later)
- Laterals the ball out of the end zone
- Kneels down in the end zone
- Makes contact with the ground in the end zone with the hand carrying the ball
- Is called for intentional grounding in the end zone

As the result of a safety, the defensive team receives 2 points and is awarded the ball on offense again. The team awarded the safety now begins on offense at the five yard line on the opposite end of the field.

First downs - Each team shall have 4 downs to either score or earn a first down. A first down is earned by reaching midfield. If a team fails to score or earn a first down, possession will go to the other team, which will receive the ball on their own 5 yard line, not at the spot of the turnover.

Punts - There are no punts. A team has four downs to either score or reach the first down marker.

Continuance of play - Play shall continue until:

- A ball carrier has his flag removed by an opponent (see Uniform and Flag Rules for exceptions and additions concerning the flag)
- A ball carrier steps out of bounds
- A ball-carrier scores a touchdown or PAT
- The ball touches the ground as a result of a fumble or incomplete pass (If the ball is pinned between the ground and the ball carrier's hand, the play is dead)
- A ball carrier's knee, elbow, or back touches the ground. This rule applies to both offensive and defensive players (after an interception for example)

Spot of the ball - The ball will be spotted where the ball is at the time the ball carrier's flag has been removed or the carrier is otherwise considered "down" (see Continuance of Play). **The offense is responsible for both the ball and the ball marker (orange disk). It is the offense's responsibility to get both of these to the line of scrimmage in a timely manner, or be subject to a delay of game penalty.**

Turnovers - A turnover can only occur on an interception of a forward pass or a lateral. Interceptions of forward passes or laterals may be advanced until the intercepting player is ruled down. A fumble (defined as the player losing possession of the ball and the ball hitting the ground) is not a turnover. The ball is dead at the point of the fumble and the offense retains possession.

The only exception to the play being blown dead is if the quarterback fumbles a snap from the shotgun formation. The quarterback will be allowed to pick up a dropped shotgun snap and continue play. The defensive player may rush at the "three one-thousand" count. If the quarterback has not picked up the ball by the time the defensive player reaches the quarterback, the defensive player may pull the flag of the quarterback to rule the play dead whether or not he has the ball. If the quarterback runs away from the defensive player without possession of the ball, the defensive player may touch the football to rule the play dead.

Rushing the quarterback – A three-count is used for rushing. The referee will count "one-one thousand, two-one thousand, three-one thousand" Players may rush only when the referee finishes the final "one thousand." The quarterback may only run past the line of scrimmage if rushed by the defense.

Substitutions - Teams may substitute players as often as they wish. Eligible receivers must be on the playing field before the snap count is started.

Uniform and Flag Rules

1) All players must wear flag belts supplied by MSSC. We use Flag-a-Tag belts with three flags. No other type of belt is allowed. All players must have one flag at each hip and one in the middle of the back.

2) Belts must be worn on top of all layers of clothing. Loose-fitting articles of clothing (i.e. large sweatshirts, long t-shirts, etc.) should not be worn, as they can be held onto or ripped easily. Shirts should be tucked in if they are long and/or baggy. The referees have the authority to tell players to tuck in shirts.

4) Any ball carrier whose flags are deemed as not accessible to be removed by the referee will be down at the first point of potential contact with the defense.

5) Any ball carrier missing a flag for any reason (i.e. it falls off, is accidentally pulled off before reception, or is not noticed as missing before the snap, etc.) will be down at the first potential point of contact. The player does not need to be touched, and this call will be referee discretion.

6) Holding an article of clothing other than a flag will result in a 5 yard penalty from the end of the play. Any grabbing on the last play of a half or game will result in a 5 yard penalty from the point of infraction and replay of the down, even if no time remains on the clock. If this penalty occurs within 5 yards of the end zone, the ball will be spotted at the one yard line and the offense will receive one play.

Miscellaneous Rules While In Play

- No tackling. Period. The refs have discretion to remove you from the game
- All players are eligible receivers (other than the quarterback passing the ball to himself)
- The player who commences any given play as the quarterback can only advance the ball by running if he is rushed by a defensive player. In other words, QB sneaks, QB draws, and similar plays are not allowed unless the QB is rushed
- The ball must be snapped from the ground.
- The QB may not snap the ball to himself
- Loss of down penalties which occur on 4th down will result in a change of possession.
- Receivers only need one foot in bounds for a completion
- Receivers intentionally leaving the field of play are ineligible to receive a pass if they are the first person to touch the ball upon re-entry. Leaving the field of play includes going out of the back of the end zone.
- Spin moves are permitted.
- Only the ball must cross the plane of the goal line in order for a touchdown to be awarded.
- The pylons at the front of the end zone are considered in play for the purposes of touchdowns.

- Any player who attempts to aggressively knock the ball out of the quarterback's hand or hits the quarterback's arm while in delivery will receive an Unnecessary Roughness penalty. Defensive players may attempt to block a pass by raising one or both arms straight up in the air, but they may not touch the quarterback. A penalty will not be called on the rusher if the QB steps into the defender

Penalties

Normal rules and penalties of the NCAA apply unless modified herein or added. Distances have been adjusted due to the size of the fields. Penalties include:

Illegal Contact - At or Behind the Line of Scrimmage: In cases where either an offensive or defensive player initiates contact of any kind, it will be ruled a 5 yard penalty from the line of scrimmage and the down will be replayed. Examples include, but are not limited to: jamming, checking, tripping, moving picks, moving screens, forearms, stiff arms, elbowing, etc.

Illegal Contact - Down Field: If the illegal contact occurs during play when the offense is advancing the ball, the penalty will be a mark off of 5 yards from the point where the ball carrier is at the time of the infraction. If the infraction occurs during a pass play when the pass is incomplete, the penalty will be marked off 5 yards from the original line of scrimmage. The same examples listed above apply.

Holding: Holding takes many forms. A player may not grab another player's arm or hand at any time. Players may also not hold onto shirts, flag belts, shorts, or any other article of clothing. If a player accidentally grabs an article of clothing while reaching for a flag and lets go of the article of clothing immediately, a penalty will not be called. Holding onto or pulling clothing to impede progress or drag a player to the ground is not permitted. Players are not allowed to impede the progress of an opponent while trying to remove his flag. This includes wrapping a player up with one's arms, applying hands or arms to the ball carrier's chest, etc. Holding will result in a five yard penalty and an automatic first down.

Flag Guarding: The play will stand, but the penalty will result in a 5 yard mark off from the spot of the infraction, not the spot where the runner is eventually ruled down. Note: If the flag guarding occurs on fourth down and the resulting yardage, after the penalty is marked off, does not result in a first down, then it is a turnover on downs. Flag guarding includes, but is not limited to:

- Stiff-arming or extending either arm in any manner that prevents a defender from grabbing a flag
- Holding onto the flag or belt
- Tucking the flag into or wrapping it around any article of clothing
- Holding the football over the belt or flag to prevent defensive players from grabbing a flag
- Holding onto a defensive player's hand or arm, or swatting a hand or arm away to keep him from removing the belt
- Using foreign objects such as pins to secure the flags
- Blocking a defensive player's hand with the football

False start (offense only): 5 yard penalty, the play is blown dead immediately, there is no option to decline, and the down is replayed.

Offsides/Neutral Zone Infraction/Early rush (offense or defense): A 5 yard penalty will be called if either team is lined up in the neutral zone or if the defense rushes early. If the penalty is on the offense, the play will be blown dead, similar to a false start. If the penalty is on the defense and is accepted by the offense, there is a five yard mark-off from the line of scrimmage against the defense and the down is repeated. If the penalty is declined, any gain on the play will stand and it will be the next down. If the penalty is committed by the offense, the defense can choose to accept the result of the play or move the offense back five yards.

Illegal Exchange: There must be a clear exchange of the football between the center and the quarterback, with the quarterback showing clear and sole possession of the ball before handing it off or throwing to another player.

Illegal Forward Pass: If the ball carrier crosses the line of scrimmage and then throws a forward pass, the defense can either decline the penalty (if the pass resulted in an incompleteness or interception), or accept the penalty, which will be 5 yards from the line of scrimmage and repeat of the down. A player's entire body must cross the line of scrimmage for it to be an illegal forward pass.

Illegal Touching/Ineligible Receiver: A player may not leave the field of play (i.e. go out of bounds), return to the field, and be the first to touch the ball. A penalty will not be called if a referee determines the player was forced out of bounds by a player on the opposing team. The penalty for a team on offense is five yards and a loss of down. If a defender goes out of bounds and makes an interception while being the first to touch the ball, the play is negated and the offense keeps the ball.

Too many players on the field: No more than six players per team on the field. If the offensive team has too many players on the field, the defense can choose to accept the penalty, which will be 5 yards from the original line of scrimmage, or decline the penalty and accept the result of the play. If the defensive team has too many players on the field, the offense can accept the penalty, which will be 5 yards from the original line of scrimmage, or decline the penalty and accept the results of the play.

Unnecessary Roughness (Offense): Unnecessary roughness by the offense during a play will result in a 10 yard penalty from the line of scrimmage and a loss of down. If the penalty occurs after the play (i.e. a dead ball situation), the penalty will result in a 10 yard mark off at the end of the play. Extreme roughness or disorderly conduct will result in an immediate ejection from the game and or league if deemed necessary by the referee and league staff. No warnings need be given. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Lowering a shoulder and initiating contact with a defender
- Stiff-arming or elbowing a defender
- Kicking or kneeing a defensive player in an attempt to hurdle a defender
- An aggressive or unnecessary dive that generates an unacceptable amount of contact with a defender

Unnecessary Roughness (Defense): If the play is dead at the time the penalty is committed and the offense has not advanced the ball, the penalty will be a 10 yard mark off from the line of scrimmage

and an automatic first down will be awarded. If the play is on-going or the offense has advanced the ball at the time the penalty is committed, the penalty will be 10 yards added on to the end of the play and an automatic first down will be awarded. Extreme roughness may result in ejection from the game and or league if deemed necessary by the referee and league staff. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Any illegal attempt to down a player, such as grabbing clothing and pulling a player to the ground
- Intentional tripping
- Tackling
- Forearms or arm bars
- Hitting the quarterback's arm in an overly aggressive manor while the quarterback is in delivery. Defensive players may attempt to block a pass by raising one or both arms straight up in the air, but they may not touch the quarterback. A penalty will not be called if the quarterback's follow through hits a defensive player's arms or body when the defender has established position and is only trying to block a pass, the quarterback steps into the defender, or if contact by the defensive player is incidental in the referee's opinion.

Defensive Pass Interference: The ball will be spotted at the point of the infraction and the offense will be awarded an automatic first down. It will not be ruled pass interference if both the offensive and defensive player had an equal opportunity to call the ball and incidental contact occurred between the players. If the pass interference occurs in the end zone, the ball will be placed on the 1 yard line and it will be 1st down.

Offensive Pass Interference: Offensive pass interference will be called when an offensive player makes any contact or takes any action that prevents a defensive player from breaking up a pass, intercepting a ball he or she otherwise would have caught, or gives the offensive player an unfair advantage in catching the ball in the referee's eyes. This includes holding a defender's arm or hand, tripping, pushing off, wrapping an arm around a player, hip-checking a defender off the ball, etc. The penalty will be 10 yards from the previous spot and a repeat of the down.

Intentional Grounding: A penalty will be called when the passer throws a forward pass without a realistic chance of completion. A pass out of bounds will not be considered intentional grounding if the passer is out of the pocket. Intentional grounding will result a loss of down and the ball will also be spotted at the point of infraction (i.e. the QB's point of release).

Fighting - Fighting will NOT be tolerated, period. All parties involved in fighting (subject to the referee's discretion) WILL be ejected from the game and subject to ejection from the league at MSSC staff discretion. No full or partial refunds will be given to any player ejected from the league for fighting.

Authority and Discretion of the Referees

The referees are authorized by MSSC to have complete control over all aspects of the game. Referees have the discretion to rule as they see fit in any situation not covered by the rules mentioned above. The decisions of the referees are final and teams may not argue calls with the referees.

Representatives of MSSC may not overturn calls by referees. The referees have a demanding job and are not perfect. Calls will be made that individuals and teams do not agree with, and calls will be missed. This is the nature of sports, and all participants must understand this.

All referees are expected to know the rules of the league and act as an impartial third party in each and every game they officiate. If a team feels that a referee is showing bias toward another team, they may report their concerns by e-mailing Club President Patrick Fosdick at patrick@madisonssc.com.

End of the Game

At the completion of the game, the referees and each team captain will sign off on the final score of the game for verification purposes. The score card will be submitted to MSSC as proof of the game's final score. All players are expected to shake hands and otherwise show good sportsmanship, regardless of the final score or any disagreements or situations that may have arisen during the game.

Results and Standings

Results and standings will be posted on the Flag Football League section of the MSSC website following receipt of the official scorecard from each game.

Playoffs

At the conclusion of the regular season, the playoffs will begin. An appropriate playoff structure will be utilized depending on the number of teams in the league.

Game Format - Playoff games will follow the same format during regulation as the regular season. If teams are tied at the end of regulation in playoffs, an overtime period will be played.

Overtime - In the playoffs, overtime periods will use a system similar to college football overtime. The overtime period will start with the referee flipping a coin, with the winning team deciding whether to play offense or defense. The "away" team will get to call the coin flip. The losing team will decide which end zone to defend. Each team will then have 4 downs to score from 10 yards out from the goal line. If a team scores, they will have the opportunity to go for one point or two points on the PAT, using the same rules as the regular season games. The game will be decided when one team scores more points than the other team during their rotating possessions. No 1st downs will be awarded except in the case of a penalty. Interceptions will result in a turnover and may not be returned for any points. If the first team on offense scores and then intercepts the other team on its attempt to score, the game is over. If the score is still tied after two complete overtime periods, each team must attempt a two point conversion after they score a touchdown. From this point on all subsequent overtime periods will continue with each team attempting a two point conversion after they score a touchdown.

Cancellation/Rainout Policy

Games may be postponed or canceled due to dangerous weather, extremely poor field conditions, or a number of other factors. MSSC must abide by city guidelines to stay off the fields in certain weather conditions or risk losing access to the fields. Rescheduled games will be added to the end of the regular season schedule.

Any cancellations will be posted on the MSSC website and e-mailed to all roster players. In some circumstances, it may not be possible to cancel the game until some or all of the participants have arrived at the site of the day's game, and in some cases, the game may need to be postponed after play has begun. These are factors outside the control of MSSC and we hope everyone understands that such inconveniences will occasionally occur.