



WARREN COUNTY FLAG FOOTBALL

OFFICIAL PLAYING RULES

2ND & 3RD GRADE

Developmental Division

Adapted from the NFL FLAG Official Playing Rules for Warren County Flag Football (WCFF) league play.

Revised: September 2026



I. GAME SETUP AND FLOW

WCFF plays on a one-way field (see Field, Section IV): every possession, by either team, always drives the same single direction toward the one end zone. There is no directional switch at halftime, and home and away teams line up on opposite sidelines for the entire game.

1. At the start of each game, captains from both teams meet at the 40-yard line for the coin toss to determine who starts with the ball. The visiting team calls the toss.
2. The winner of the coin toss has the choice of offense or defense to start the game. There is no option to defer. The team that started the game on offense will begin the 2nd half on defense.
3. The offensive team always takes possession of the ball at the 40-yard line and has four (4) downs to cross the midfield line-to-gain (the 20-yard line). Once the offense crosses the 20-yard line, it has three (3) downs to score a touchdown.
 - If the offensive team fails to cross the 20-yard line after 3rd down and elects to “punt” on 4th down, possession of the ball changes and the opposing team will start a new possession at the 40-yard line. If the offensive team goes for it on 4th down and does not cross the 20-yard line, the opposing team will start a new possession from the spot where 4th down ended.
 - Any time there is a ‘PUNT or PLAY’ decision on 4th or 3rd down, the referee will ask the offense’s head coach to declare ‘Punt or Play.’ The coach must make an immediate decision or risk a delay-of-game penalty. A declaration to ‘Punt’ is final and cannot be changed.
 - Teams may use a timeout to change the declaration of “Play” at any time prior to the expiration of the play clock.
 - After crossing the 20-yard line, if the offense fails to score on 3rd down, the ball changes possession and the new offensive team starts at the 40-yard line.

One-Way Field Rules

4. Every new possession — to start the game, to start the 2nd half, after a score, after a turnover on downs, or after an interception — always begins at the 40-yard line.
5. There are no safeties on WCFF’s one-way field. If a ball-carrier would otherwise be ruled down for a safety, the ball is instead spotted at the 40-yard line and possession changes to the other team.
6. The ball will never be spotted further back than the 40-yard line, regardless of penalty enforcement or loss of yardage on a play.
7. Interceptions during regulation play are dead balls the instant they’re caught — they are not advanced or returned — and the new possession is spotted at the 40-yard line (see Receiving, Section XI). Overtime interceptions are handled differently (see Timing and Overtime, Section V).
8. Home and away teams line up on opposite sidelines for the entire game.

II. TERMINOLOGY

Term	Definition
Boundary Lines	The outer lines marking the playing field’s perimeter, including sidelines and end zones.
One-Way Field	A field with a single end zone, where every possession (by either team) always drives the same direction, starting from the 40-yard line (see Field, Section IV).



Term	Definition
Line of Scrimmage	(LOS) An imaginary line running through the point of the football and across the width of the field.
Line-to-Gain	The yard line the offense must reach for a first down.
Rush Line	An imaginary line 7 yards from the line of scrimmage on the defense's side (divisions where rushing the passer is allowed — see Section XII).
Offense	The team with possession of the ball.
Defense	The team trying to stop the offense and regain possession.
Passer	Any offensive player who throws the ball, not just the quarterback.
Rusher	The defensive player who starts from the rush line and tries to pressure the quarterback by either pulling flags or blocking passes (divisions where rushing is allowed).
Live Ball	Refers to the period of time that the play is in action. Generally used in regard to penalties. Live-ball penalties are considered part of the play and must be enforced before the down is considered complete.
Dead Ball	The time between plays when no action is occurring.
Whistle	Official's signal to stop play for timeouts, end of plays, or game periods.
Inadvertent Whistle	An official's whistle that is sounded in error.
Charging	When a ball-carrier illegally runs directly into a set defensive player. This includes leading with the head or making contact with shoulder, forearm, or chest.
Flag Guarding	An illegal act when the ball-carrier tries to block defenders from pulling their flags — whether by stiff-arming, dropping their elbow/head, or using the ball itself as a shield.
Shovel Pass	A legal forward pass across the LOS (underhand, backhand, or by pushing the ball forward).
Lateral	A backward or parallel toss of the ball by the ball-carrier.
Unsportsmanlike Conduct	Confrontational or offensive behavior or language.

III. EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST

1. All players must wear WCFF-approved flag belts and flags. All players **MUST** wear mouth guards at all times while on the field. Game balls should be age-specific.
2. Players must wear shoes. Cleats may not be allowed at certain locations; this will be specified by your league organizer or site director. However, cleats with exposed metal are never allowed and must be removed.
3. Players may tape their forearms, hands, and fingers. Players may wear gloves, elbow pads, and knee pads. Braces with exposed metal are not allowed.
4. Players must remove all jewelry and hats. Headbands or winter beanies are allowed.
5. Players may wear soft-shell helmets, halos, and sunglasses, but they must be secured at all times while on the field. Prescription glasses are permitted without a strap.
6. Players' jerseys must be tucked into shorts or pants if they hang below the belt line.



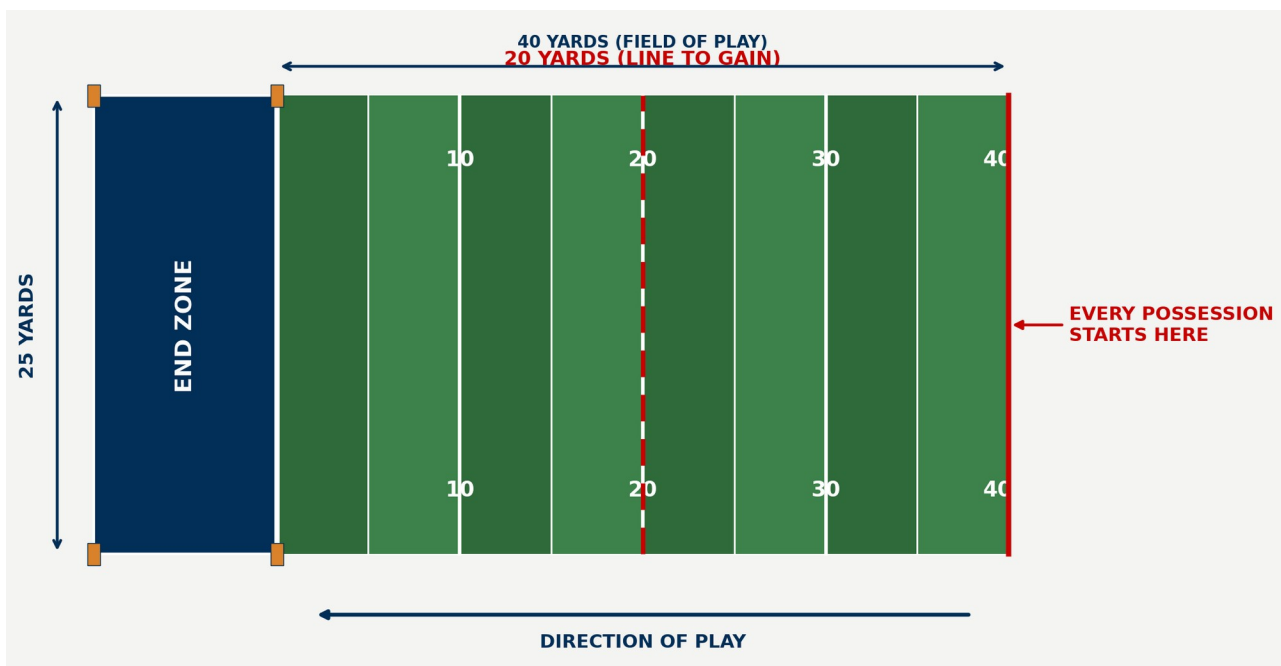
7. We recommend players wear shorts or pants that do not have pockets or belt loops. Games will not be delayed for a player to tape their pockets.
8. Participants must bring their own flag belt and mouth guard to the field. Extra belts and mouth guards may be available for purchase.
9. Game footballs will be provided by WCFF.
 - Flag belts and flags cannot be the same color as the player's shorts or pants.
10. Electronic communication between any player and their coach or a spectator for their team is prohibited during games. A team or individual using electronic communication with a player or coach, at any time, will be disqualified immediately from play. This does not limit possible additional discipline at the sole discretion of the WCFF league organizer.

IV. THE FIELD

Field Dimensions and Layout — One-Way Field

WCFF plays on a one-way field: 25 yards wide by 40 yards long (goal line to the 40-yard line), with a single 10-yard end zone at the scoring end. Every possession — by either team — always starts at the 40-yard line and drives the same single direction toward that one end zone. There is no end zone or scoring area behind the 40-yard line (see Game Setup and Flow, Section I for the full one-way field rules).

1. The field has one midfield line-to-gain, located 20 yards from the goal line — the exact center of the 40-yard field of play. This is the line the offense must cross for a first down (see Game Setup and Flow, Section I).
2. This division plays with 'No Run Zones' eliminated — teams may run the ball anywhere on the field. (See Running Game, Section IX.)
3. Stepping on the boundary line is considered out of bounds.
4. The referee will spot the ball in the middle of the field prior to the 'Ready to Play' whistle. The ball may NOT be spotted closer than 10 yards to either sideline.



Field of play, 25 yards wide by 40 yards long, plus a single 10-yard end zone. Play always moves toward the end zone.

V. TIMING AND OVERTIME



Games are played on a 48-minute continuous clock with two 24-minute halves, unless one team gains a 35-point lead, which will end the game. Teams can agree to continue without changing the score. The clock stops for halftime, injuries, and at the officials' discretion.

Halftime is 2 minutes.

Once the ball is spotted, a team will have 40 seconds to snap the ball.

Teams will have one 60-second timeout per half. Timeouts do not carry over to the second half.

Officials will stop the clock for team timeouts, player injuries, and at their discretion.

If the score is tied at the end of regulation play, an overtime period will be used to determine the winner. Overtime format is as follows:

- The home team calls the coin toss to determine the team that chooses to be on offense or defense first.
- If a second round of overtime must be played, the team that lost the first coin toss will get to choose offense or defense for the start of the second round. This process continues, with teams alternating the choice to be on offense or defense to start every round of overtime.
- The referee will determine which end of the field the entire overtime will be played on.

a. 1st Overtime

Each team will get one (1) play from the defense's 5-yard line for one point, or the defense's 10-yard line for two points. Each team has the choice to go for 1 or 2 points in the first overtime period only.

Example: Team A starts on offense and chooses to go for one point from the 5-yard line and is successful. Team B is then on offense and can choose to either go for one point from the 5-yard line to tie and force a second round of overtime, or go for two points from the 10-yard line for the win. If the second team on offense in an overtime round fails to beat or match the team that went first, the game is over.

b. 2nd Overtime and Beyond

Starting with the 2nd overtime, both teams must attempt a 2-point conversion from the 10-yard line.

Starting with the 3rd overtime, each team will get 1 play from the 5-yard line going out from the end zone. The team with the most yards gained wins and is awarded 1 point added to their final score.

The final score will be recorded to include all points scored in the overtime periods. All regulation-period rules and penalties are in effect.

There are no timeouts in overtime. Each team will be afforded one (1) 'coach's challenge' for the entire overtime session. A challenge must be a misapplication of a rule, not a judgement call by an official.

Interceptions are returnable for a score in overtime and are worth 2 points. Interceptions returned for a score in the first or second overtime period end the game immediately. Interceptions advanced in the third overtime period also end the game.

VI. SCORING GUIDE

1. Touchdown: 6 points.
2. PAT (point after touchdown): 1 point (from the 5-yard line) or 2 points (from the 10-yard line).
 - A 1-point extra point attempt is pass only; a 2-point extra point attempt can be a run or pass.
3. Interceptions are dead balls during regulation play and are not returnable for points (see Field, Section IV, One-Way Field Rules). Interceptions returned during overtime are worth 2 points (see Timing and Overtime, Section V).
4. There are no safeties on WCFF's one-way field (see Field, Section IV, One-Way Field Rules).



5. A team that scores a touchdown must declare whether it wishes to attempt a 1-point conversion (from the 5-yard line) or a 2-point conversion (from the 10-yard line). Any change, once a decision is made, requires a charged timeout. A decision cannot be changed after a penalty.
6. When one team is winning by 35 points or more, the game is over.
7. Forfeits will be scored 35-0 for the winning team.
8. The coaches, officials, and scorekeeper must verify the score sheet. If a coach does not verify the score sheet before leaving the field, the scorekeeper will note this on the score sheet and the score will be FINAL.

VII. COACHING GUIDELINES

1. Coaches are expected to adhere to WCFF philosophies, coaching guidelines, and code of conduct.
2. One coach per team is permitted on the field of play prior to the snap, to help set up their players, but must be off the field before the snap of the ball.
 - All team photographers, managers, position coaches, team parents, fans, etc. are required to remain off the playing field in the designated league viewing area.
 - Coaches are responsible for their fans' conduct and behavior, plus any other associated team members in their designated team area.

VIII. LIVE BALL / DEAD BALL REGULATIONS

1. The ball is live at the snap of the ball and remains live until the official whistles the ball dead.
2. The official will indicate the neutral zone and line of scrimmage.
 - It is an automatic dead-ball foul if any player on defense or offense enters the neutral zone. Game officials may give teams a "courtesy" neutral-zone notification to allow their players to move back behind the line of scrimmage.
3. A player who gains possession of the ball in the air is considered in bounds, as long as the first foot or a body part other than the hand contacts the ground in the field while maintaining possession.
4. Substitutions may be made during any dead-ball period.
5. The defense may not simulate the offensive team's signals by trying to confuse the offensive players while the quarterback is calling out signals to start the play. Other unfair acts include not returning five (5) eligible players to the field of play after halftime, or a team or official's timeout prior to the 'Ready to Play' signal by the referee. This will result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty on the head coach.
6. Any official can whistle the play dead.

Play is ruled "dead" when:

- The ball hits the ground.
- If the ball hits the ground as a result of a snap, backward pitch, or lateral, the ball will be placed where the ball hit the ground.
- The ball-carrier's flag is pulled.
- The ball-carrier steps out of bounds.
- A touchdown or PAT is scored (there are no safeties on WCFF's one-way field — see Field, Section IV).
- The ball-carrier's knee, shin, leg, forearm, or arm hits the ground.
- The ball-carrier's flag falls out.
- The receiver catches the ball while in possession of 1 or 0 flag(s).
- The 7-second pass clock expires.
- An inadvertent whistle occurs.



- The ball-carrier leaves their feet to dive, jump, or hurdle a player. (Exception: a player can dive to catch a pass or pull a flag.)

Note on fumbles/loss of possession: Ground contact must be made for the play to be dead at that spot. A fumble is a loss of possession by a player, resulting in the ball contacting the ground.

7. If an inadvertent whistle occurs, the team in possession has two options: take the ball where the whistle blew and the down will count, or replay the down from the original line of scrimmage. If an inadvertent whistle occurs on the last play of the half or game, the offense will be awarded one untimed down and given those two options.
8. A team is allowed to use a timeout to question an official's rule interpretation. If the official's ruling is correct, the team will be charged a timeout. If the rule is interpreted incorrectly, the timeout will not be charged and the proper ruling will be enforced.

IX. RUNNING GAME

1. The ball is spotted where the ball is when the flag is pulled.
2. The quarterback cannot directly run with the ball across the line of scrimmage. The quarterback is the offensive player who receives the snap under center directly or in shotgun formation.
3. Direct handoffs, pitches, and laterals are permitted behind the line of scrimmage only. If this takes place, after the ball-carrier crosses the line of scrimmage, the play is to be blown dead by the official. The ball shall be placed at the spot possession was lost for the next play.
 - “Center sneak” plays are NOT allowed. The QB may NOT handoff, pitch, or lateral the ball first to the center.
 - Any player who receives a handoff, backward pass, pitch, or lateral can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage.
 - Once the ball has been handed off, in front of, behind, or to the side of the quarterback, or a backward pass, pitch, or lateral has occurred, the 7-second passing clock is eliminated and all defensive players are eligible to rush.
4. Definition of a “Legal Handoff”: total loss of possession directly from 1 offensive play to another.
5. This division has no ‘No Run Zones’ — teams may run the ball anywhere on the field (see Field, Section IV).
6. Runners are not permitted to jump, leap, or hurdle, in the officials’ judgement, while advancing the ball. The play is to be blown dead and the ball spotted where the jump, leap, or hurdle occurred.
7. Ball-carriers may leave their feet, and the play will continue, for spinning, jump cuts, or a QB’s passing motion, or if there is a clear indication that they have done so to avoid a collision with another player. The play will continue without stoppage. However, if while leaving the ground illegal contact is made, a penalty may be enforced by the official.
8. No blocking or “screening” is allowed at any time.
9. Offensive players in close proximity to the ball-carrier must stop their motion once the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage. No running with the ball-carrier.
10. Flag obstruction: All jerseys MUST be tucked in before play begins. The flags must be on the player’s hips and free from obstruction. Deliberately obstructed flags will be considered flag guarding.
11. Once the ball is advanced beyond the line of scrimmage, the current ball-carrier is the only player allowed to have possession of the ball until the play is dead.

X. PASSING



1. Only 1 forward pass, thrown from behind the line of scrimmage, is permitted each offensive play. The ball must be released prior to crossing the line of scrimmage. There can be unlimited backward passes behind the line of scrimmage.
 - There is no intentional grounding. The quarterback may throw the ball anywhere across the line of scrimmage to avoid a sack.
 - All forward passes that do not cross the line of scrimmage are illegal forward passes, unless touched by a defender. All forward passes must go beyond the line of scrimmage.
2. Shovel passes are allowed and must be a forward pass, thrown from behind the line of scrimmage, and received beyond the line of scrimmage.
3. The quarterback has a 7-second "pass clock." If a pass is not thrown within 7 seconds, the play is dead, the down counts, and the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage. Once the ball has been handed off, pitched, or lateraled behind the line of scrimmage, the 7-second rule is no longer in effect.
 - If the QB is standing in the end zone at the end of the 7-second clock, the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage (LOS) and it will be the next down.
 - If the quarterback throws the ball and then catches it, the play is dead and treated like an incomplete pass.

XI. RECEIVING

1. All players are eligible to receive passes (including the quarterback, if the ball has been handed off, pitched, or lateraled behind the line of scrimmage).
2. A player must have at least one foot or other body part in bounds, contacting the ground first, with possession.
3. In the case of simultaneous possession by both an offensive and defensive player, possession is awarded to the offense.
4. During regulation play, an interception is a dead ball the instant it's caught — it is not advanced or returned, and the new possession is spotted at the 40-yard line (see Field, Section IV, One-Way Field Rules). During overtime, interceptions ARE returnable and are worth 2 points (see Timing and Overtime, Section V).

XII. RUSHING THE PASSER

There is no pass rush in this division.

1. Defenders may NOT rush or pressure the quarterback while the ball remains with the quarterback. Defenders may not cross the line of scrimmage until the ball has been legally handed off, pitched, or lateraled behind the line of scrimmage.
2. Once the ball has been handed off, pitched, or lateraled behind the line of scrimmage, all defenders may cross the line of scrimmage to defend and pull the flag of the new ball-carrier (see Running Game, Section IX).
3. A sack cannot occur in this division, since there is no pass rush. However, if the quarterback does not release the ball within the 7-second pass clock, the play is dead, the down counts, and the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage (see Passing, Section X).

XIII. FLAG PULLING

1. A legal flag pull takes place when the ball-carrier is in full possession of the ball.
2. Defenders can dive to pull flags but cannot tackle, hold, or run through the ball-carrier when pulling flags.
3. It is illegal to attempt to strip or pull the ball from the ball-carrier's possession at any time.
4. If a player's flag inadvertently falls off during a play while that player has possession, the player is down immediately and the play ends. The ball is placed where the flag lands.



5. If a player who has one or no flags on their belt takes possession of the ball, the play is dead at that spot on the field.
6. A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flag(s) off a player who is not in possession of the ball.
7. Flag guarding is an attempt by the ball-carrier to obstruct the defender's access to the flags by stiff-arming, dropping the head, hand, ball, arm, or shoulder, or intentionally covering the flags with the football jersey.

XIV. FORMATIONS

1. Offenses must have a minimum of one player on the line of scrimmage (the center) and up to four players on the line of scrimmage. The quarterback must be off the line of scrimmage.
2. Movement simulating the snap, by a player who is set, is considered a false start.
3. The center must snap the ball with a rapid and continuous motion between his/her legs to a player in the backfield, and the ball must completely leave his/her hands.

Only one player is allowed in motion when the ball is snapped. The player MUST be in motion, off the line of scrimmage. All motion must be parallel or backward to the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.

Players may shift positions on offense at any time; all players must still reset for 1 second prior to the snap.

XV. UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT

If the field monitor or game officials witness any acts of intentional tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, blocking, or any unsportsmanlike act, the game will be stopped and the player will be ejected from the game. The decision is made at the game officials' discretion. No appeals will be considered.

Offensive or confrontational language is NOT allowed. Officials have the right to determine offensive language. If offensive or confrontational language occurs, the officials will penalize for unsportsmanlike conduct and determine if an ejection is warranted.

Players or coaches may not physically or verbally abuse any opponent, coach, or game official.

Ball-carriers MUST make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position.

1. Defenders must give free releases off the line of scrimmage to offensive players and are not allowed to run through the ball-carrier when pulling flags. Offensive players may NOT initiate contact at the line of scrimmage with defenders.
2. Fans must also adhere to good sportsmanship:
 - Fans should cheer on their players only, not harass officials or the opposing team.
 - Comments must be clean and profanity-free.
 - Compliment ALL players, not just one child or team.
3. Fans are required to keep fields safe and kid-friendly, and adhere to league requirements for seating:
 - Keep younger kids and equipment, such as coolers, chairs, and tents, a minimum of 10 yards off the field in the end-zone area.
 - Stay in the end-zone area, not between fields.
 - Dispose of ALL trash in designated trash cans.

Unsportsmanlike Conduct Penalties

- Defensive penalty: +10 yards from the dead-ball spot and an automatic first down.
- Offensive penalty: -10 yards from the dead-ball spot and a loss of down.
- Two (2) unsportsmanlike-conduct penalties on any player or coach in a game result in a disqualification and may lead to additional discipline.



XVI. PENALTIES

i. General

The game officials will administer all penalties.

The officials will determine incidental contact that may result from the normal run of play.

All penalties will be assessed from the line of scrimmage, except as noted (spot fouls).

Only the team captain or head coach may ask the referee questions about rule clarification and interpretations.

Games or halves may not end on a defensive penalty unless the offense declines it.

Penalties are assessed live ball then dead ball. Live-ball penalties must be assessed before the down is considered complete.

Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal when the penalty yardage is more than half the distance to the goal.

Spot fouls administered in the end zone: defensive (ball on the one-yard line, first down). WCFF's one-way field has no safeties (see Field, Section IV) — an offensive spot foul near the end zone instead results in loss of down, with the ball spotted at the previous line of scrimmage (never worse than the 40-yard line).

ii. Defensive Spot Fouls

Defensive Spot Fouls	Penalty
Defensive pass interference	Automatic first down
Holding / Illegal Contact	+5 yards and automatic first down
Stripping	+5 yards and automatic first down

iii. Offensive Spot Fouls

Offensive Spot Fouls	Penalty
Screening or blocking	-5 yards and loss of down
Charging	-5 yards and loss of down
Flag guarding	-5 yards and loss of down
Holding / Illegal Contact	-5 yards and loss of down

iv. Defensive Penalties

Defensive Penalties	Penalty
Defensive unnecessary roughness	+10 yards and automatic first down
Defensive unsportsmanlike conduct	+10 yards and automatic first down
Offside / illegal substitution	+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
Taunting	+10 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down

**v. Offensive Penalties**

Offensive Penalties	Penalty
Offensive unnecessary roughness	-10 yards and loss of down
Offensive unsportsmanlike conduct	-10 yards and loss of down
Offside / false start / illegal substitution	-5 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down
Illegal forward pass (any pass received or lands behind the line of scrimmage, or thrown 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
Taunting	-10 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down