



ROOKIE TACKLE IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE



American Development Model / 2018 National Opt-In

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
1: IMPLEMENTATION AND GAME PHILOSOPHY	4
2: PLAYING FIELD	5
3: 6-PLAYER RULES	6
4: 7-PLAYER RULES	12
5: 8-PLAYER RULES	17
6: TIMING AND OVERTIME	23
7: SCORING	23
8: PARTICIPATION	24
9: COACHING EDUCATION	25
10: RECOMMENDED SEASON LENGTH AND GAMES PER SEASON	25
11: WEEKLY PRACTICE AND CONTACT LIMITS	25



INTRODUCTION

USA Football's Rookie Tackle is a small-sided tackle football game designed to be implemented as a bridge game between flag football and 11-on-11 tackle within youth football leagues and clubs across the country as a child's first experience to tackle football. USA Football believes that an age-appropriate and developmental approach to the game driven by high-quality coaching will improve athlete enjoyment and skill development. By modifying the game at younger age groups and educating coaches, commissioners, officials and parents on the game adjustments, mechanics and skills, we can create an age-appropriate, athlete-centered understanding that leads to a better experience.

1 / IMPLEMENTATION AND GAME PHILOSOPHY

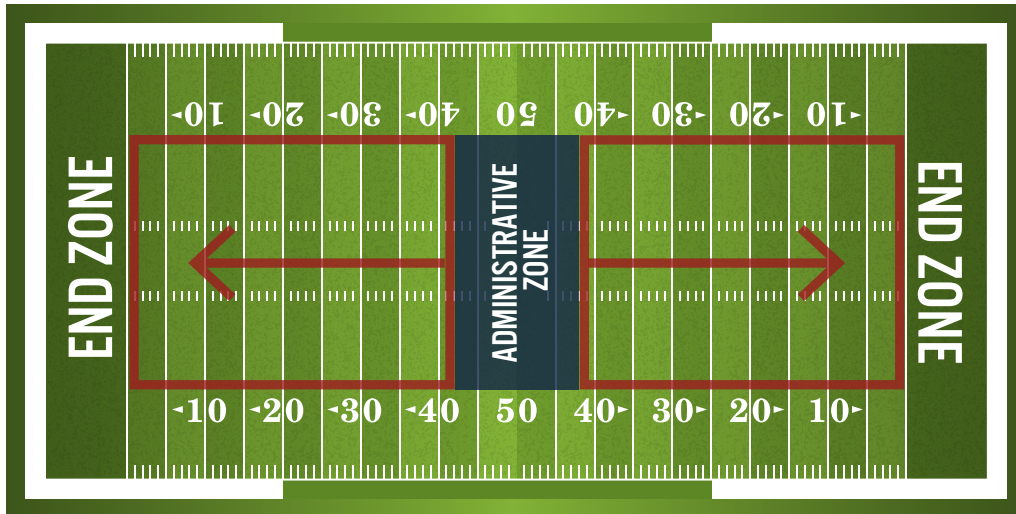
Like all other forms of youth football, USA Football envisions leagues and clubs adopting the Rookie Tackle game structure and adding this offering to their league pathway. While USA Football will provide the initial game structure and rule book, we are aware it will be governed and implemented at local levels. As such, the number of players on the field may vary from six to eight to meet community needs, registration numbers or individual circumstances.

The goals of the Rookie Tackle game are:

1. All participants learn to play all positions and learn all football skills that are required by the game.
2. Maximizing player enjoyment and skill development.
3. Ensuring all players have meaningful playing time and the opportunity for improvement and success.
4. Providing a bridge between flag football and the 11-player, full-field tackle version.
5. Encouraging leagues to play on a smaller field size that is appropriately scaled to the age and skill level of the youth football player.
6. Encouraging a fast-paced game with more plays, greater activity and the promotion of fun.
7. Emphasizing fundamental skill development by isolating situations for players to showcase their abilities via formation regulations and limited field size.
8. Allowing leagues and clubs to maximize field space by playing two games at a time on one regulation-sized football field.
9. Limiting roster sizes to foster participation and provide more focused, individualized coaching attention during practice and on game day.

USA Football recognizes that local community situations differ greatly. Limitations on the number of volunteer coaches available, registration, field space or equipment may lead to different needs. Because of these situations, USA Football has adopted rules for 6-, 7- and 8-player versions of Rookie Tackle.

2 / PLAYING FIELD



1. The playing field is 40-by-35 1/3 yards, allowing for two fields to be created on a traditional 100-yard field at the same time.
2. The sidelines extend between the inside of the numbers on a traditional football field and should be marked with cones every five yards. Use traditional pylons, if available, to mark the goal line and the back line of the end zone.
 - a. Additional cones can be placed between the five-yard stripes and in line with the inside of the numbers to further outline the playing surface if desired.
3. All possessions start at the 40-yard line going in toward the end zone.
 - a. This leaves a 20-yard buffer zone between the two game fields for game administration and safety purposes. Game officials, league personnel, athletic trainers and designated coaches are allowed in this space.
 - b. Players not in the game stand on the traditional sidelines with one or more coach to supervise. On the change of possession, every player on the bench rotates onto the field.
4. First downs, down markers and the chain gang are administered in accordance with National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) or local rules – starting from the 40-yard line.

3 / 6-PLAYER RULES

Rookie Tackle uses the NFHS rule book as a base and employs the following adjustments for 6-player football.

1. Because of the all players, all positions, all skills philosophy, there are no restrictions on jersey numbers or player positions.
2. All game action takes place on one half of the field with all possessions starting on the 40-yard line going toward the end zone.
3. A turnover on downs brings the ball back to the 40-yard line, and the teams switch sides from offense to defense, defense to offense.
4. Turnovers on interceptions or fumbles are blown dead immediately. No returns are allowed in order to protect players from running toward the 20-yard administration zone between the two fields. Play restarts on the 40-yard line with the recovering/intercepting team now on offense. There are no defensive touchdowns.
5. After each play, the ball is spotted in the middle of the field. Hash marks are not used.
6. Because of the limited field size, all 15-yard penalties are enforced as 10-yard penalties.
7. No penalty on the offense can take the ball beyond the 40-yard line to ensure the administration zone is free.
8. Penalties on the offense that are called and accepted on or behind the 40-yard line result in a loss of down.
9. Penalties on the offense called between the 40-yard line and the end zone in which yardage is lost, even if limited in enforcement by the 40-yard line, are enforced as written in terms of down lost or replayed.
10. There are no defensive safeties. Tackles behind the 40-yard line are respotted at the 40-yard line with the offense still retaining the ball as long as a down remains.
11. All personal foul penalties include an immediate substitution from the field for a minimum of one play to allow coaches to address misconduct and promote good sportsmanship. We call this a cooling off period.
12. All plays are blown dead and the ball is returned to the 40-yard line if an offensive ball-carrier or a fumbled ball crosses over midfield or at the official's discretion if coaches, administrators or players from the multiple fields and the dead zone area become close enough in proximity to be a concern for safety.

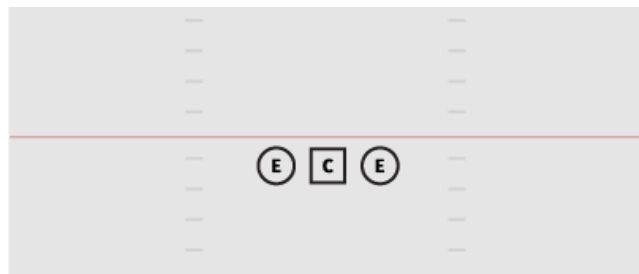
Special teams adjustments:

1. There are no special teams.
 - a. There are no kickoff or punts. Each possession starts with the ball on the 40-yard line, regardless of whether there is a score, turnover or turnover on downs.
 - b. There are no extra points by a kick.
 - i. All PATs are attempted through a run or pass try. Coaches can choose to go for one point from the 3-yard line or two points from the 5-yard line.

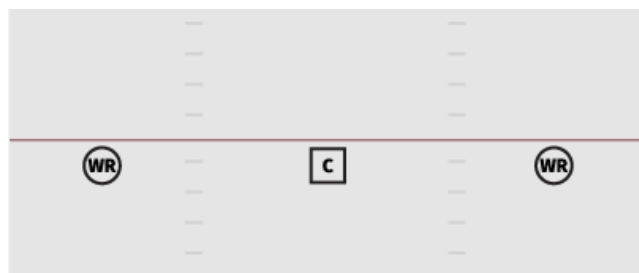
Offensive adjustments:

1. The quarterback-center exchange may be direct, pistol or shotgun.
2. All players are eligible to receive a pass.
 - a. Any pass to the snapper/center must travel at least 1-yard beyond the line of scrimmage.
3. All players, except for the center, may receive a handoff behind the neutral zone and become a runner.
 - a. Rule application: A player aligned on the line of scrimmage next to the center in a two-point stance may receive a handoff behind the line of scrimmage. He or she is considered an end, not a guard, and is not required to align in the backfield to be an eligible runner.
4. The player who receives the snap may not directly run with the ball. A handoff, pitch or toss must take place, and the player who receives the ball may run.
 - a. If the player who is intended to receive the snap fumbles the ball or it touches the ground before a handoff takes place, he or she is still not eligible to advance the ball, only to recover it.

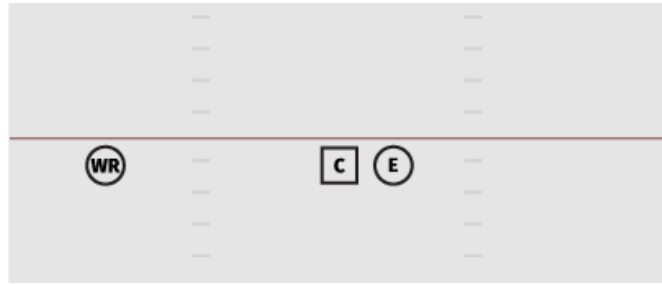
5. At least three players – one of which is the center – must be on the line of scrimmage at the snap. These players must be on opposite sides of the center but may be aligned close, as if guards,



or wide as if receivers



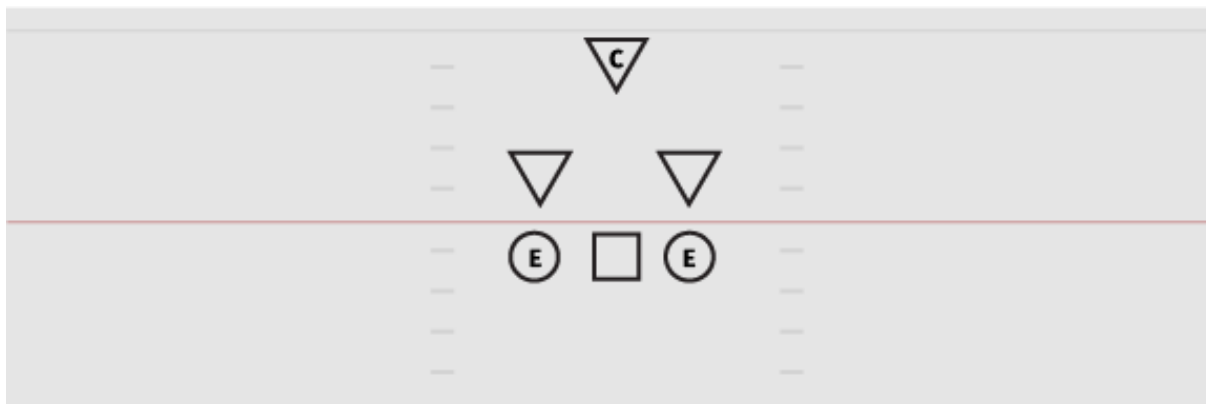
or mixed.



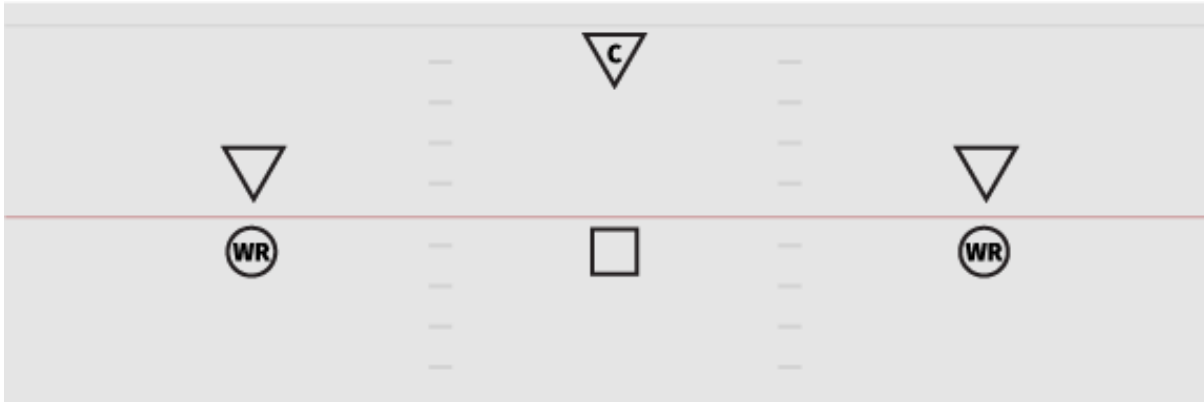
6. All players must be in a two-point stance even if aligned and functioning as traditional offensive lineman. Only the center may be in a three-point stance and only with one hand on the ball. The other hand must be off the ground.
7. The remaining three players must be aligned in the backfield but can be deployed at a coach's discretion, slot receiver, wing back, running back, etc.
8. Motion is allowed by backfield players.
9. There is no blocking below the waist by any player anywhere on the field.

Defensive Adjustments

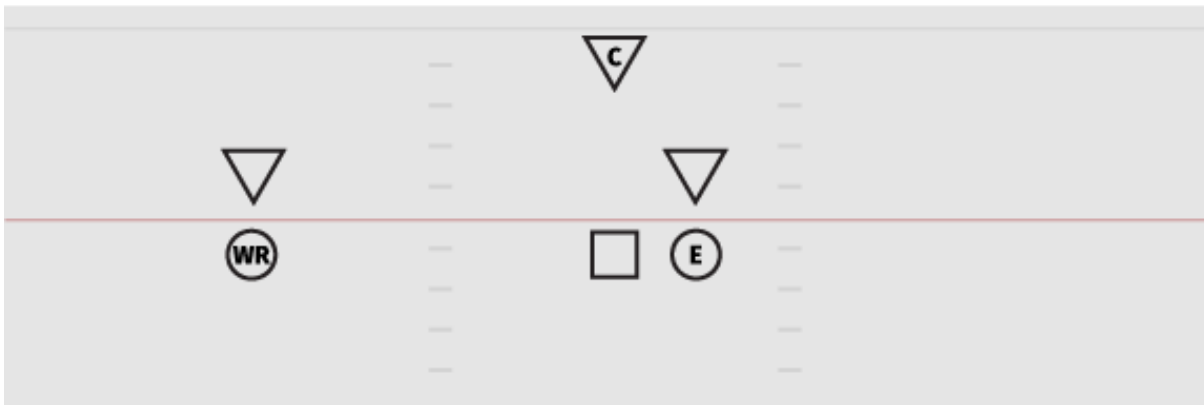
1. The center must be uncovered. The defensive player aligned directly in line with the center must be four yards behind the line of scrimmage.
2. Defensive players covering the other two players on the line of scrimmage may also align on the line of scrimmage but must remain in a two-point stance and must be aligned directly overtop the offensive line of scrimmage player. They may not shade inside or outside to the gap.



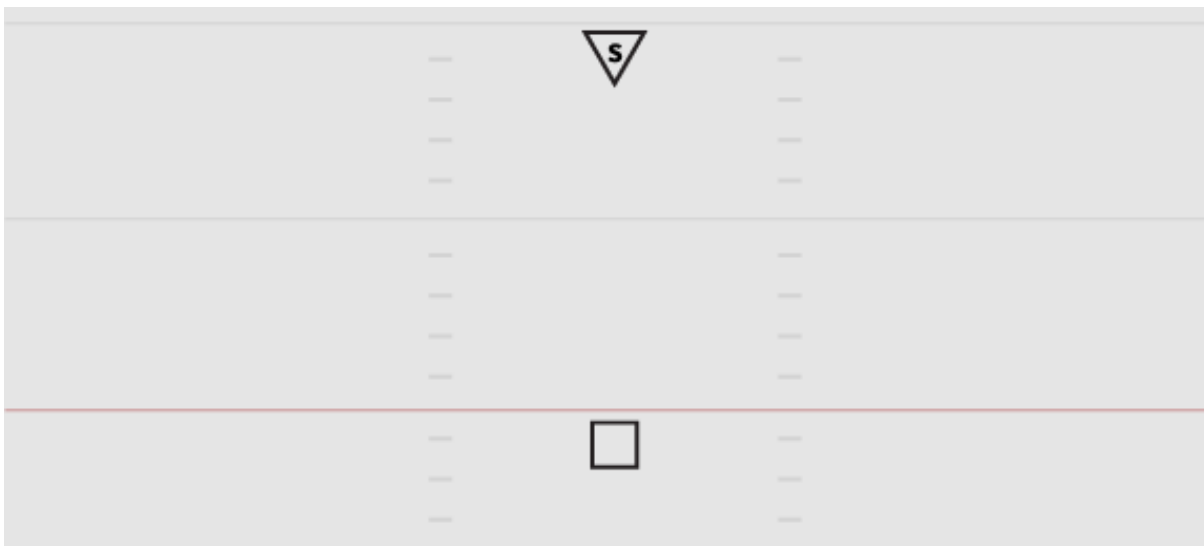
Or versus a wide player (still must be head up; cannot shade inside or outside).



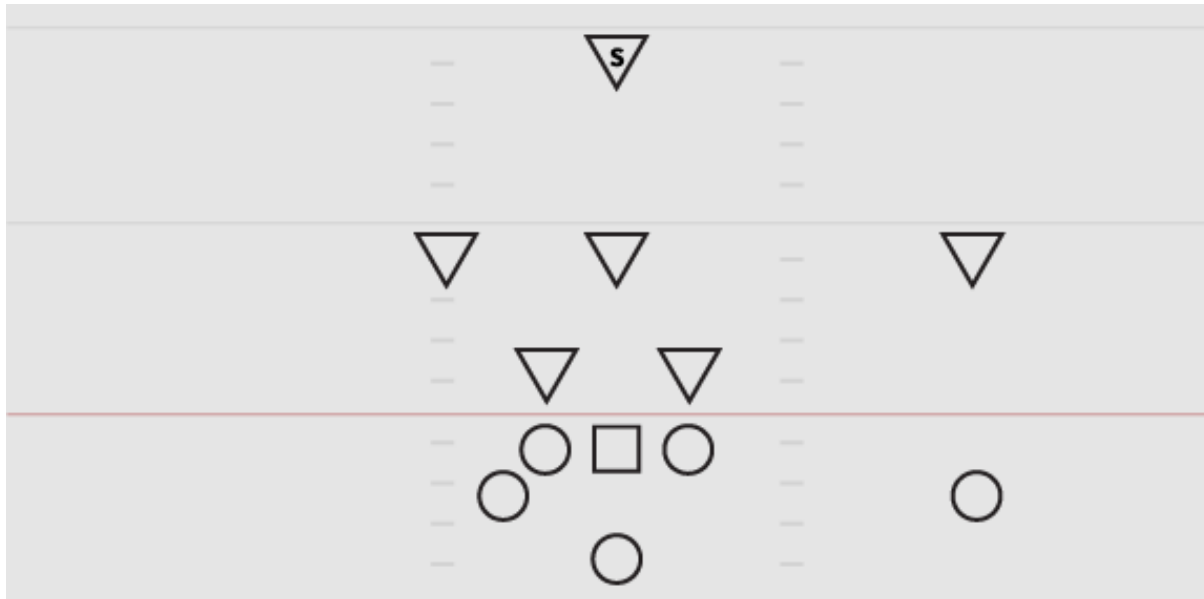
Versus a mixed formation, both defensive players are on the line of scrimmage and head up.



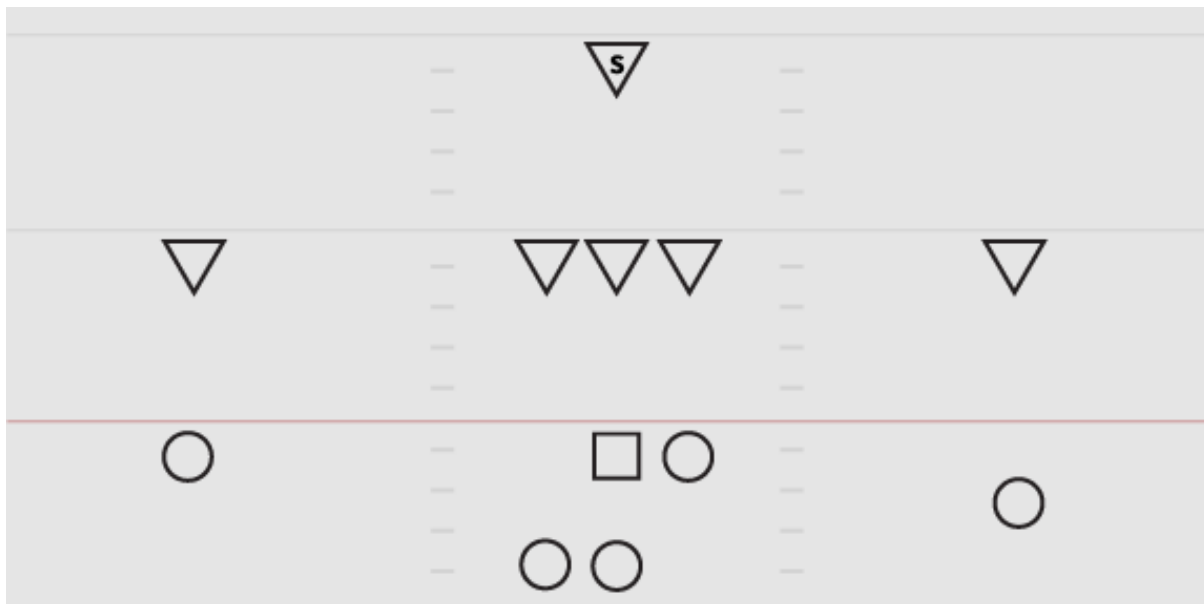
3. At least one player must be aligned at 10-yards depth as if a traditional safety.



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4. All other players must be aligned at four-yards depth.



5. Defenses are not required to match line of scrimmage players and can align more player at depth.



6. No blitzes are allowed. Players within the box at the snap can penetrate upon the snap. Linebackers, safeties and cornerbacks (both on the line and at depth) can flow to the ball naturally after a handoff is made, but predetermining penetration to a specific gap is illegal.

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- a. The box includes offensive players who line up within two yards of the ball and on the line of scrimmage along with the defensive players lined up directly over them.
 - b. On pass plays, anyone outside the box on the snap cannot rush the quarterback and must remain behind the line of scrimmage in pass coverage.
 - c. Coaches are encouraged to be creative with their formations but not use “the box” to delay defensive penetration.
 - d. NOTE: The restriction on blitzing is intended to encourage skill development within the passing game and allow young players to execute a successful handoff with limited penetration.
7. If the ball is inside the 4-yard line, the three non-linemen, non-deep players may align on the goal line.

4 / 7-PLAYER RULES

Rookie Tackle uses the NFHS rule book as a base and employs the following adjustments for 7-player football:

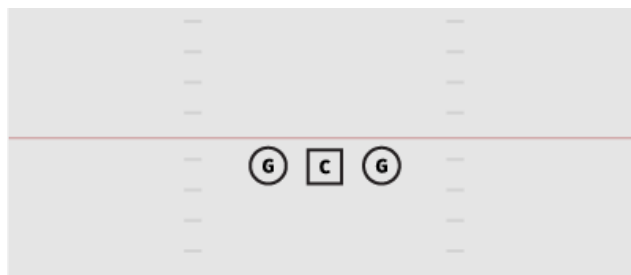
1. Because of the all players, all positions, all skills philosophy, there are no restrictions on jersey numbers or player positions.
2. All game action takes place on one half of the field with all possessions starting on the 40-yard line going toward the end zone.
3. A turnover on downs brings the ball back to the 40-yard line, and the teams switch sides from offense to defense, defense to offense.
4. Turnovers on interceptions or fumbles are blown dead immediately. No returns are allowed in order to protect players from running toward the 20-yard administration zone between the two fields. Play restarts on the 40-yard line with the recovering/intercepting team now on offense. There are no defensive touchdowns.
5. After each play, the ball is spotted in the middle of the field. Hash marks are not used.
6. Because of the limited field size, all 15-yard penalties are enforced as 10-yard penalties.
7. No penalty on the offense can take the ball beyond the 40-yard line to ensure the administration zone.
8. Penalties on the offense that are called and accepted on or behind the 40-yard line result in a loss of down.
9. Penalties on the offense called between the 40-yard line and the end zone in which yardage is lost, even if limited in enforcement by the 40-yard line, are enforced as written in terms of down lost or replayed.
10. There are no defensive safeties. Tackles behind the 40-yard line are respotted at the 40-yard line.
11. All personal foul penalties include an immediate substitution from the field for a minimum of one play to allow coaches to address misconduct and promote good sportsmanship. We call this a cooling off period.
12. All plays are blown dead and the ball is returned to the 40-yard line if an offensive ball-carrier or a fumbled ball crosses over midfield or at the official's discretion if coaches, administrators or players from the multiple fields and the dead zone area become close enough in proximity to be a concern for safety.

Special teams adjustments:

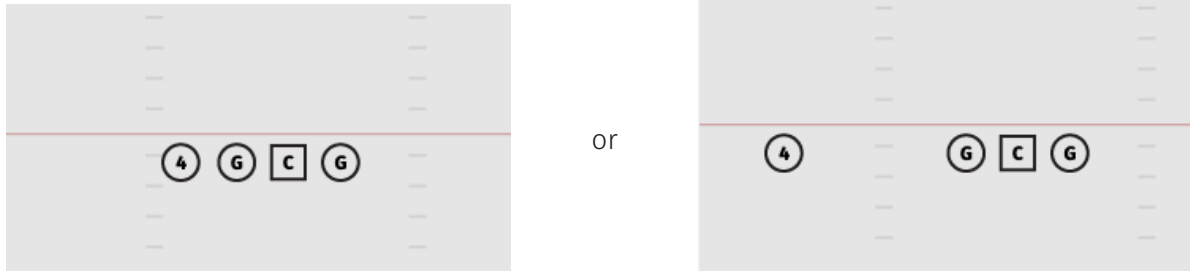
1. There are no special teams.
 - c. There are no kickoff or punts. Each possession starts with the ball on the 40-yard line, regardless of whether there is a score, turnover or turnover on downs.
 - d. There are no extra points by a kick.
 - i. All PATs are attempted through a run or pass try. Coaches can choose to go for one point from the 3-yard line or two points from the 5-yard line.

Offensive adjustments:

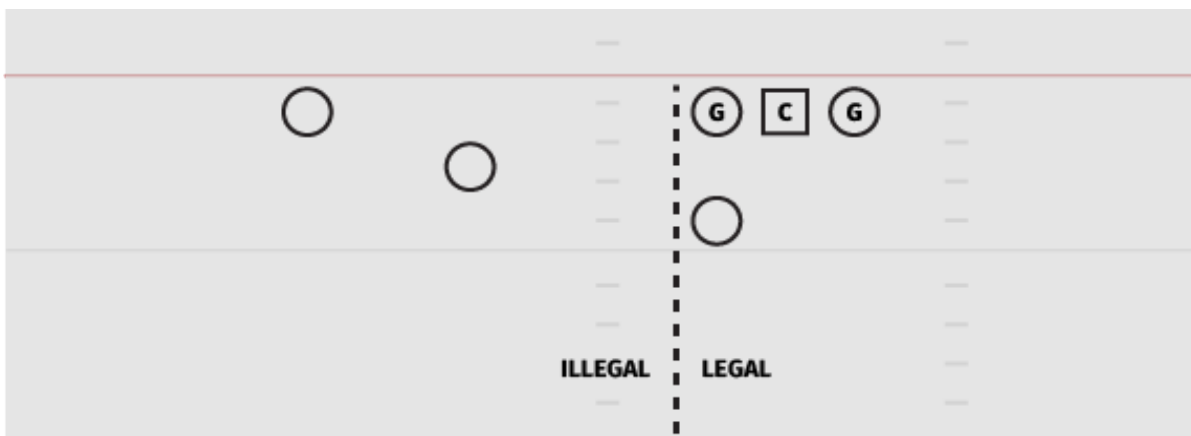
1. Each play must include three offensive linemen – a center and two guards, one on either side of the center. These players are ineligible for first touch as the receiver of a pass regardless of the numbers on their jerseys. Player rotations may result with traditional non-lineman numbers at these positions for the purpose of fundamental skill development.
2. Guards are required to play from a two-point stance. There are no three-point stances.
3. The center may only have his or her snapping hand down.
4. The distance between a guard and center may not exceed three feet (1 yard) but may be closer.
5. Because of the all players, all positions, all skills philosophy, players should change positions during the game. Therefore:
 - a. The three offensive linemen must identify themselves on each play by raising their hands as they break the huddle and approach the line of scrimmage.
 - b. Once identified as an offensive lineman, players may not shift to another position.
 - c. All three offensive linemen are ineligible for first touch on a pass, including a guard who is uncovered by an end.
6. The quarterback-center exchange may be direct, pistol or shotgun.
7. Quarterback sneaks are prohibited in all situations because the defense is not allowed to have players aligned over the center or in the center-guard A gap.



8. The offense must have four players on the line of scrimmage. No more, no less. The fourth player can be a tight end or split end. See figures below.



9. The four offensive players who are not playing guard or center may be deployed in positions at the coach's discretion as long as one is on the line of scrimmage (see rule 9).
10. No trips formations are allowed.
- a. For purpose of Rookie Tackle, Trips is defined as any three players outside the guard-to-guard box

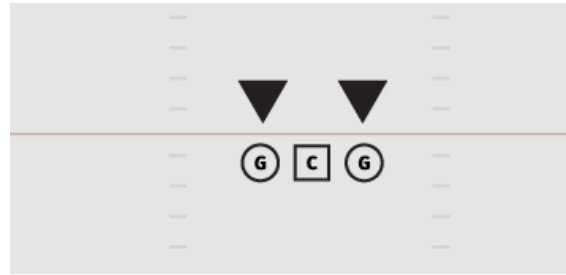


11. Motion is allowed by a backfield player as long as it does not create a trips formation..
12. All blocks below the waist, in any situation, are illegal.

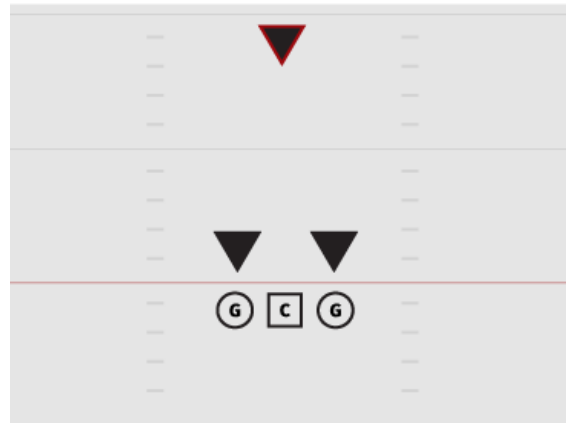
Defensive Adjustments

1. Defenses may only have two defensive linemen unless an offensive formation includes a tight end. In that case, a third defensive lineman may line up over the tight end.
2. Defensive linemen must be in a two-point stance.
3. Defensive linemen over guards must be aligned in a head up or outside shade position.

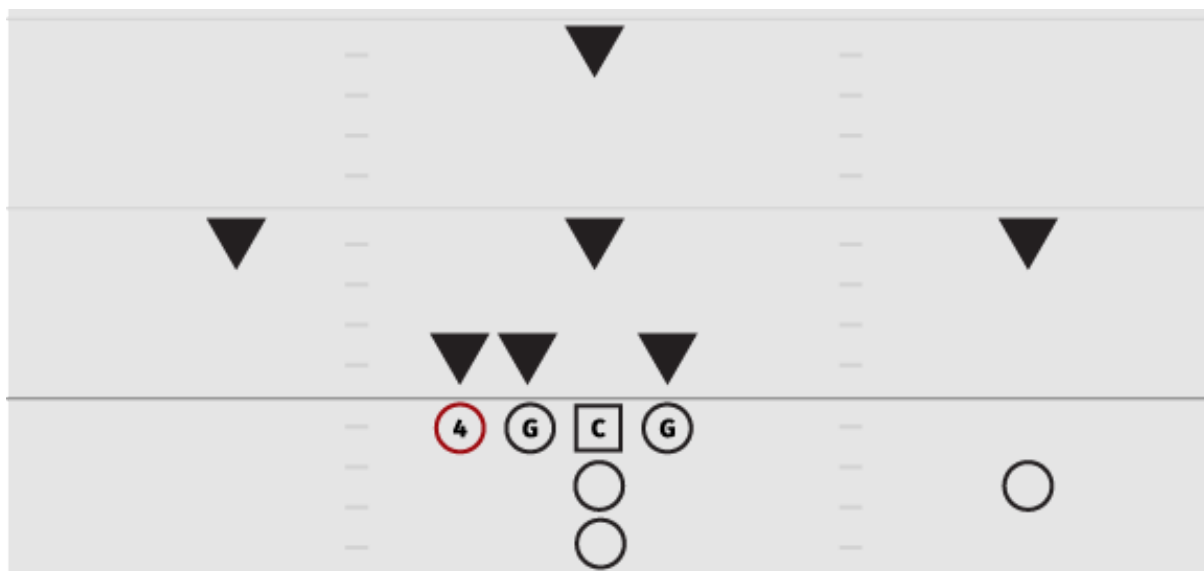
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4. Players in an outside shade must always have one foot aligned inside the stance of the opposing guards



5. The defense must have one player at least 10 yards from the ball.



6. The remaining four players can be deployed at the coach's discretion but must be four yards off the line of scrimmage unless covering a tight end or split end on the line of scrimmage.
- a. Example: If the offense aligns with its fourth line-of-scrimmage player as a tight end, then the defense may align a player directly over the tight end on the line of scrimmage to balance the running surface.



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- b. Defenses are not required to match the fourth player on the line of scrimmage but have the option to do so.
 7. No blitzes are allowed. Players within the box at the snap can penetrate upon the snap. Linebackers, safeties and cornerbacks (both on the line and at depth) can flow to the ball naturally after a handoff is made, but predetermining penetration to a specific gap is illegal.
 - a. The box includes offensive players who line up within two yards of the ball and on the line of scrimmage along with the defensive players lined up directly over them.
 - b. On pass plays, anyone outside the box on the snap cannot rush the quarterback and must remain behind the line of scrimmage in pass coverage.
 - c. Coaches are encouraged to be creative with their formations but not use “the box” to delay defensive penetration.
 - d. NOTE: The restriction on blitzing is intended to encourage skill development within the passing game and allow young players to execute a successful handoff with limited penetration.
 8. If the ball is inside the 4-yard line, the four non-linemen, non-deep players may align on the goal line.

5 / 8-PLAYER RULES

Rookie Tackle uses the NFHS rule book as a base and employs the following adjustments for 8-player football:

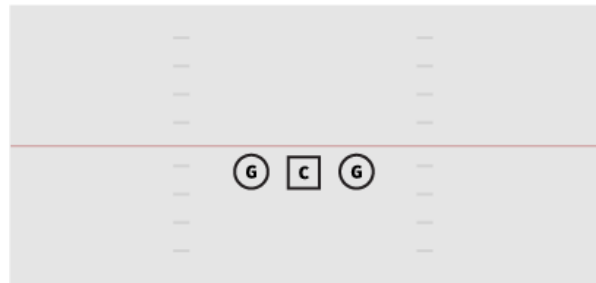
1. Because of the all players, all positions, all skills philosophy, there are no restrictions on jersey numbers or player positions.
2. All game action takes place on one half of the field with all possessions starting on the 40-yard line going toward the end zone.
3. A turnover on downs brings the ball back to the 40-yard line, and the teams switch sides from offense to defense, defense to offense.
4. Turnovers on interceptions or fumbles are blown dead immediately. No returns are allowed in order to protect players from running into the 20-yard administration zone between the two fields. Play restarts on the 40-yard line with the recovering/intercepting team now on offense. There are no defensive touchdowns.
5. After each play, the ball is spotted in the middle of the field. Hash marks are not used.
6. Because of the limited field size, all 15-yard penalties are enforced as 10-yard penalties.
7. No penalty on the offense can take the ball beyond the 40-yard line to ensure the administration zone.
8. Penalties on the offense that are called and accepted on or behind the 40-yard line result in a loss of down.
9. Penalties on the offense called between the 40-yard line and the end zone in which yardage is lost, even if limited in enforcement by the 40-yard line, are enforced as written in terms of down lost or replayed.
10. There are no defensive safeties. Tackles behind the 40-yard line are respotted at the 40-yard line.
11. All plays are blown dead and the ball is returned to the 40-yard line if an offensive ball-carrier or a fumbled ball crosses over midfield or at the official's discretion if coaches, administrators or players from the multiple fields and the dead zone area become close enough in proximity to be a concern for safety.
12. All personal foul penalties include an immediate substitution from the field for a minimum of one play to allow coaches to address misconduct and promote good sportsmanship. We call this a cooling off period.

Special teams adjustments:

1. There are no special teams.
 - e. There are no kickoff or punts. Each possession starts with the ball on the 40-yard line, regardless of whether there is a score, turnover or turnover on downs.
 - f. There are no extra points by a kick.
 - i. All PATs are attempted through a run or pass try. Coaches can choose to go for one point from the 3-yard line or two points from the 5-yard line.

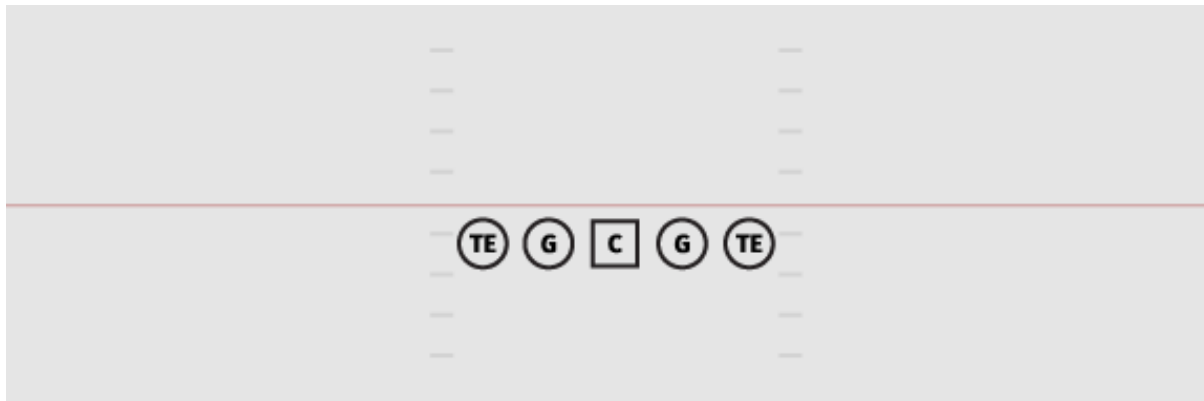
Offensive adjustments:

1. Each play must include three offensive linemen – a center and two guards, one on either side of the center. These players are ineligible for first touch as the receiver of a pass. Player rotations may result with traditional non-lineman numbers at these positions for the purpose of fundamental skill development.

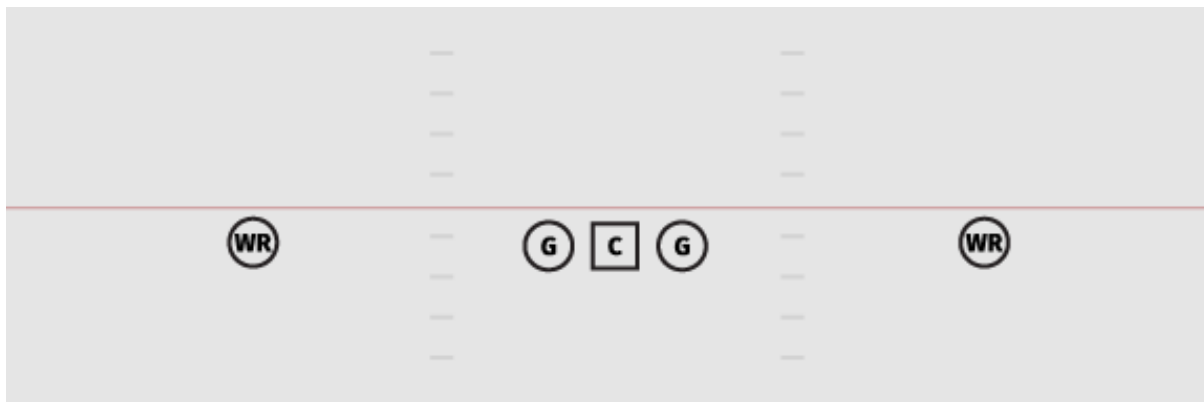


2. Guards are required to play from a two-point stance.
3. The center may only have his or her snapping hand down.
4. The distance between a guard and center may not exceed three feet (1 yard) but may be closer.
5. Because of the all players, all positions, all skills philosophy, players should change positions during the game. Therefore:
 - a. The three offensive linemen must identify themselves on each play by raising their hands as they break the huddle and approach the line of scrimmage.
 - b. Once identified as an offensive lineman, players may not shift to another position.
 - c. All three offensive linemen are ineligible for first touch on a pass.
6. The quarterback-center exchange may be direct, pistol or shotgun.
7. Quarterback sneaks are prohibited in all situations because the defense is not allowed to have players aligned over the center or in the center-guard A gap.
8. The offense must have five players on the line of scrimmage. No more, no less. The fourth and fifth players can be tight ends, split ends or a combination of the two. Only the two end players on the line of scrimmage are eligible for first touching of a pass.

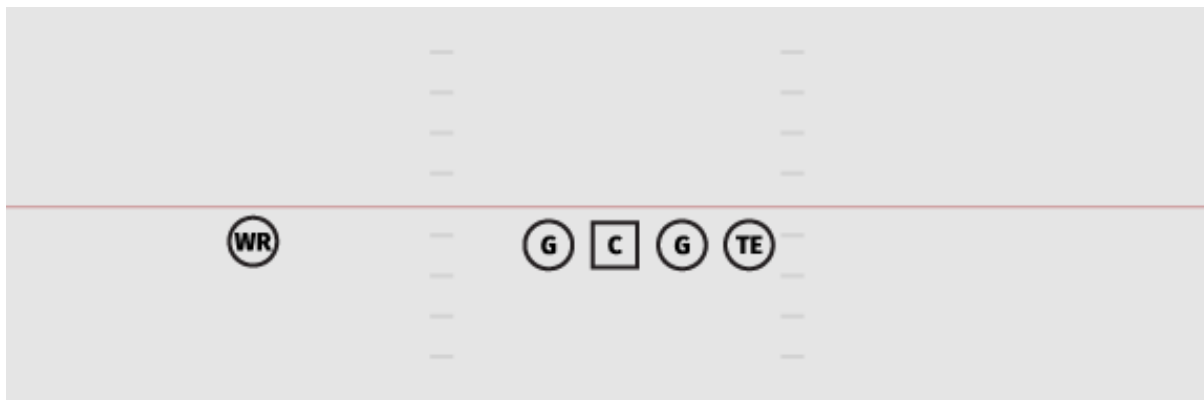
-
9. There are no unbalanced lines. The split ends/tight ends must be on opposite sides of the center.



or



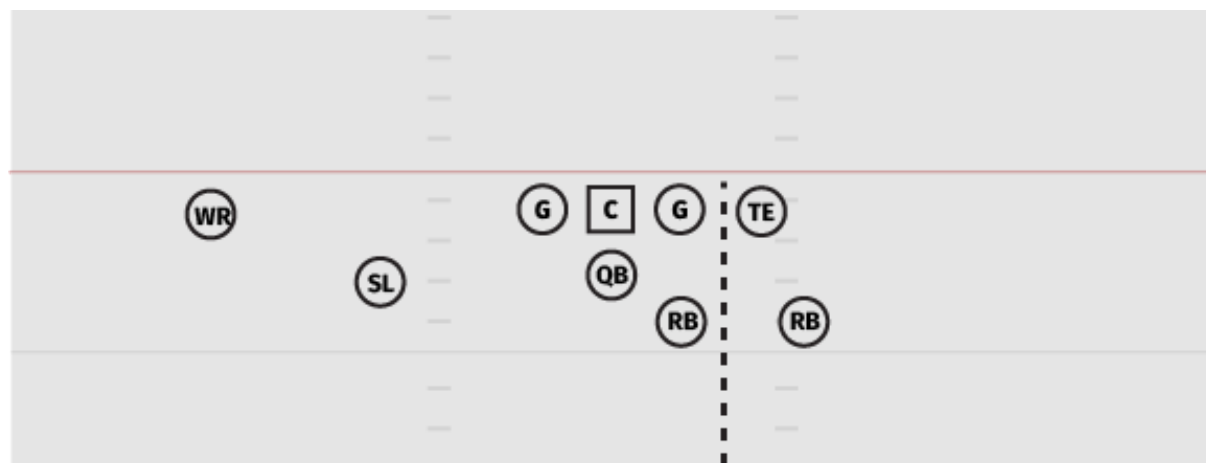
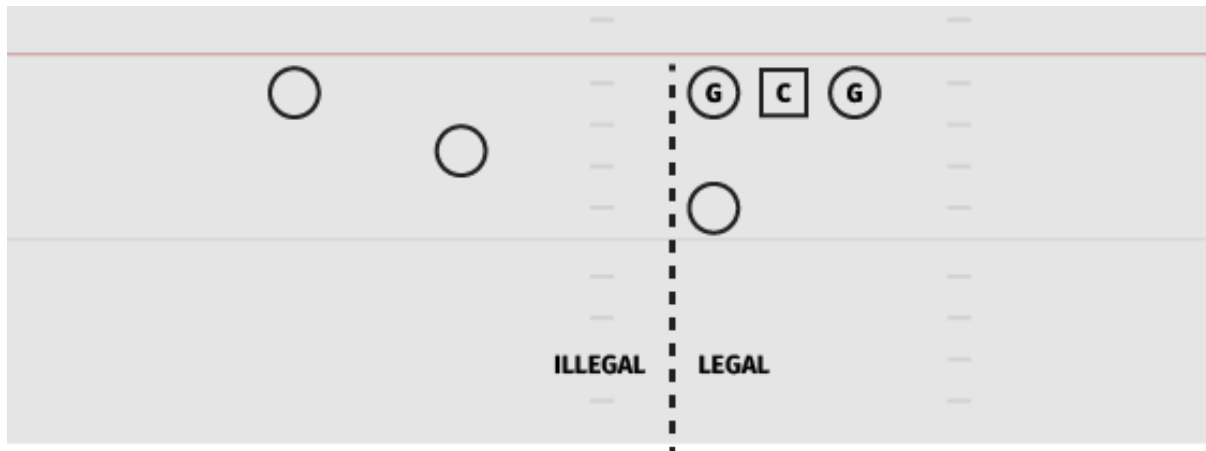
or



10. The five offensive players who are not playing guard or center may be deployed in positions at the coach's discretion as long as two are on the line of scrimmage (see rule 9).
- Multiple running backs, slot receivers, wing backs, etc., are allowed but also must be balanced.

11. No trips formations are allowed.

- a. For purpose of Rookie Tackle, Trips is defined as any three players outside the guard-to-guard box



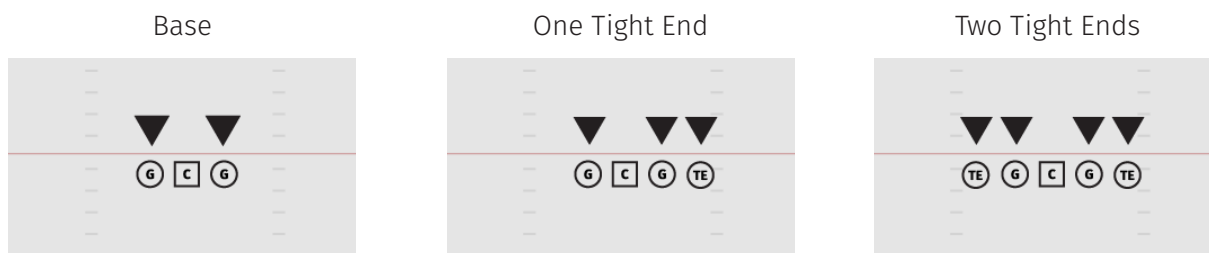
(Both legal: Even if outside the G-G box, there are only two players on that side of the field, not Trips)

12. Motion is allowed as long as it does not form a trips formation.

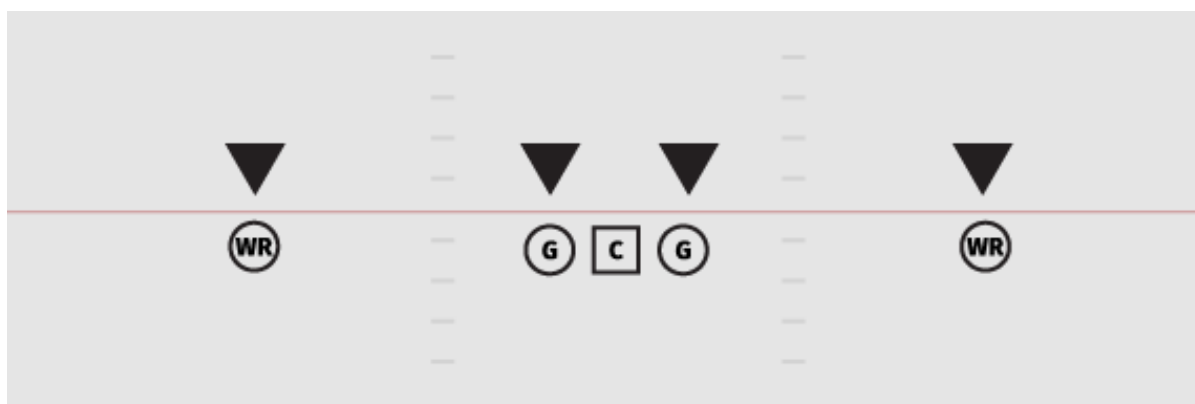
13. All blocks below the waist by any player anywhere on the field are illegal

Defensive adjustments:

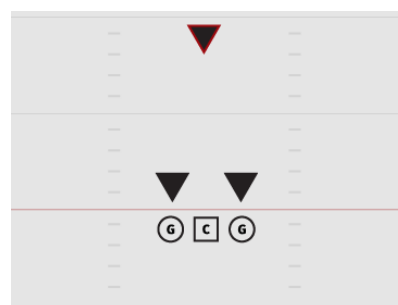
1. Defenses may only have two defensive linemen unless an offensive formation includes a tight end. In that case, a third defensive lineman may line up over the tight end. Two tight ends allows the defense to use four defensive linemen.



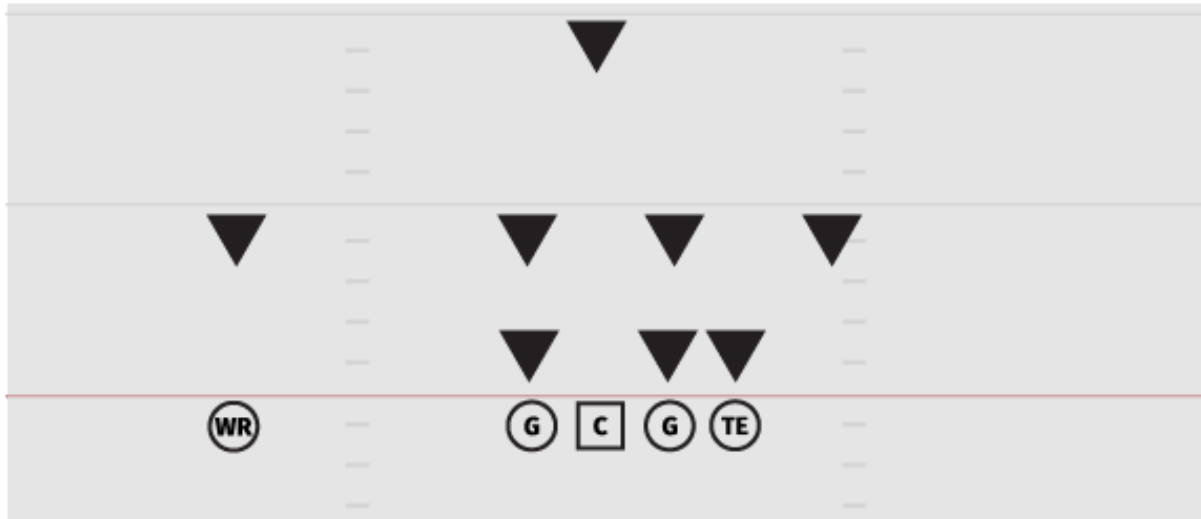
2. Defensive linemen must be in a two-point stance.
3. Defensive linemen must be aligned on the guards and/or tight ends in a head up position.
 - No shade or gap alignment
4. If the offense aligns with no tight ends, the defense may still align with four players on the line of scrimmage, but they must be positioned over the receivers they are covering.
 - With the exception of the players covering the guards, the defense is not required to have additional players on the line of scrimmage but has the option to do so.



5. The defense must have one player at least 10 yards from the ball.



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6. All remaining players not on the line of scrimmage or at deep safety must be four yards off of the line of scrimmage.
- Defenses that choose to not match the eligible receivers on the line of scrimmage may position those players on the second level as long as they are at least 4 yards from the ball.



7. No blitzes are allowed. Players within the box at the snap can penetrate upon the snap. Linebackers, safeties and cornerbacks (both on the line and at depth) can flow to the ball naturally after a handoff is made, but predetermining penetration to a specific gap is illegal.
- The box includes offensive players who line up within two yards of the ball and on the line of scrimmage along with the defensive players lined up directly over them.
 - On pass plays, anyone outside the box on the snap cannot rush the quarterback and must remain behind the line of scrimmage in pass coverage.
8. Coaches are encouraged to be creative with their formations but not use “the box” to delay defensive penetration.
9. If the ball is inside the 4-yard line, the five non-linemen, non-deep players may align on the goal line.

6 / TIMING AND OVERTIME

1. Each game is made up of four 10-minute quarters with a running clock.
2. The option for adjusting the number of timeouts or to stop the clock on PAT tries or turnovers is a league-specific decision.
3. The first- and third-quarter breaks are two minutes to allow for water, rest, instruction and new position assignments to ensure rotations occur and players learn multiple skills.
4. Halftime is five minutes.
5. Total game time is 49 minutes, not including timeouts. This allows for each age group to be on and off the field in one hour.
6. Overtime is played only in playoff games (if the league hosts playoffs).
 - a. For more information on playoffs, see the appendix and ensure that playoffs fit within the recommended number of total games per season for the age group.
 - i. This may limit the number of regular season games played by a league.
 - b. To ensure equal playing and individual development opportunities for all players, consolation rounds should be played by those leagues that host playoffs.

7 / SCORING

1. Offensive touchdowns are worth six points.
2. PATs are the coach's choice to attempt a one-point try from the 3-yard line or a two-point try from the 5-yard line.
3. With no special teams, there are no field goal attempts.
4. There are no defensive touchdowns as all turnovers are blown dead immediately. No returns are allowed to limit play back in the direction of the administrative zone.
5. There are no two-point defensive safeties. All tackles behind the 40-yard line result in a loss of down, but the offense retains the ball, and the ball is re-spotted at the 40-yard line to preserve the administrative zone.

8 / PARTICIPATION BEST PRACTICES

USA Football Rookie Tackle coaches will be trained to teach the fundamentals of every position with the aim to rotate players to sample a variety of positions throughout the course of the season. The goal of the 6-, 7- and 8-player bridge game is to introduce players to contact skills of blocking and tackling while building off of the flag football model of multi-position skill development. To accomplish this, “all player, all positions, all skills” remains the focus for coaches in this introduction to tackle football.

USA Football recommends that team rosters be set at two times the game format being played. Rosters limits should therefore be set to 12, 14 or 16 players in accordance with league adoption. This roster size ensures all players achieve meaningful playing time and is more manageable for the coach. Upon a change of possession, all players on the bench should rotate onto the field. Players should be rotated not only between offense and defense but among both line and backfield positions during the course of a game. Initial practices of changing positions by quarter in order to match up “big vs. big” and “small vs. small” on both the line and covering each other at skill positions has provided structure to the substitutions pattern in our pilot testing of this game format. USA Football recognizes that body size alone is not the determining factor of on-field success and therefore coaches should look to ensure competitive matchups by a blend of body size, speed, temperament, skills and ability.

These rules should act to guide opposing teams’ coaches in a partnership of providing the best developmental experience for players, not to be exploited in order for coaches to scheme favorable matchups in search of victory.

Mismatches in ability levels should be identified early on in the game and changes made as soon as possible to ensure competitive balance. Coaches are encouraged to keep players at an assigned position for the duration of the quarter and rotate on the quarter break. Athletes are not to be situationally shifted from line to skill positions during the quarter when a key moment occurs.

Fourth- and fifth-grade age levels of Rookie Tackle football can adopt the Junior Tackle Football rules of assigning two position each on offense and defense – either the line or backfield – with the all players, all positions mandate lifted. This rule change is allowed at the older age groups as this group, by age, could qualify for Junior Tackle and could be playing under Rookie Tackle rules because of league structure, organizational size or other factors

9 / COACHES

Each team is allowed two coaches in the huddle and on the field at all times to facilitate instruction, faster play calling, to keep the speed of the game and activity levels high. Once the huddle is broken, the on-field coaches may and should assist the officials in alignment issues as the goal of the game is development, not persistent penalties.

After the huddle is broken, though, there is to be no extra instruction, audibles or changing of plays allowed. Extra instruction after the huddle break will result in one (1) warning, and any continued infractions will result in a 5-yard penalty. This rule is enforced per team, not per individual coach.

Teams have the option to rotate which coaches are on the field at any time.

10 / RECOMMENDED SEASON LENGTH AND GAMES PER SEASON

Rookie Tackle football is designed to be fall-only seasons with a maximum of 10 games per season. There should be a minimum of five days off between games to allow for adequate rest, recovery and practice time dedicated to fundamental skill development and learning the game.

A league that incorporates playoffs into its yearly calendar must adjust the number of regular season games as well as preseason scrimmages so the total does not exceed 10 competitions. Leagues that host playoffs should also consider hosting consolation rounds so that all members of all teams receive the same number of games and opportunity for development.

11 / WEEKLY PRACTICES AND CONTACT LIMITS

Rookie Tackle, regardless of the format and number of players, should limit preseason practices to three per week with no two-a-days. After an acclimatization period is conducted, full-contact drills (defined as Thud and Live Action by USA Football's Levels of Contact) should be limited to 30 minutes per practice for no more than 90 minutes total per week.

During the regular season and playoffs, practice is reduced to a maximum of two per week to accommodate the game with each practice having a full-contact limit of 30 minutes and not exceeding 60 minutes per week.

**THE PRECEDING REPRESENTS PRACTICE AND IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES BASED ON OUR CURRENT LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE. RECOMMENDATIONS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE 2017 TESTING PERIOD TO ACCOMMODATE KEY ACADEMIC LEARNING FROM THE RIGOROUS SCIENTIFIC STUDY PLANNED AROUND THESE GAME MODIFICATIONS. **