



## 5-on-5 Football Rules

2023

### Foreword

The rules are revised each year to improve the sport's level of safety and quality of play, and to clarify the meaning and intent of rules where necessary. The principles that govern all rule changes are that they must:

- be safe for the participants;
- be applicable at all levels of the sport;
- be coachable;
- be administrable by the officials;
- maintain a balance between offense and defense;
- be interesting to spectators;
- not have a prohibitive economic impact; and
- not be unduly divergent from the rules adopted by IFAF and NCAA in the USA.

These rules apply to all contests involving BAFA affiliated teams and take effect from 1st March 2023 (Exception: Competitions that began before 1st March 2023 will continue to use 2022 rules until the end of their competition).

BAFA has established a Rules Committee to discuss and decide future changes to this book. The Committee is also our liaison to IFAF on rules matters. You may make suggestions for changes at any time, but to be eligible for consideration for the following year they must be received by 31st August.

Dr Jim Briggs, BAFRA (Editor) on behalf of the BAFA Rules Committee

Those who find it necessary to write to the editor for interpretations of rules or play situations will receive prompt replies if they number their questions and email them to [rules@britishamericanfootball.org](mailto:rules@britishamericanfootball.org)

## General Principle

ARTICLE 1. 5-on-5 football shall be played under the rules of 11-a-side contact football with the following changes. Where a rule is in conflict with 11-a-side rules or clearly does not apply, the 5-on-5 rule takes precedence.

## The Game

ARTICLE 2. a. The game shall be played between two teams of no more than 5 players each. The minimum number of players in a squad and the number of those permitted to be in uniform shall be determined by the competition authority. **Exception: A competition minimum only needs to be met at the scheduled kickoff time; thereafter the minimum is 5.**

b. A team may legally play with fewer than 5 players, but all requirements regarding positions must still be met.

c. All 11-a-side rules relating to breaking the huddle, substitutions and illegal participation apply with the relevant "5/more than 5/less than 5" substituted in place of "11/more than 11/less than 11" as appropriate.

## Supervision

ARTICLE 3. The game shall be played under the supervision of 2, 3, 4 officials. The officials shall use the officiating mechanics as specified in the current edition of the Manual of Flag Football Officiating, published by IFAF.

## The Field

ARTICLE 4. a. The field of play (area between the goal lines) shall be a rectangular area of length 50 yards and width 25 yards. This may be varied to a minimum of 40 yards if necessary to fit into the playing enclosure, as long as the length between the goal lines remains an even number of yards.

b. The end zones shall be 10 yards. This may be varied to a minimum of 8 yards if necessary to fit into the playing enclosure.

c. The following markings must be present, the use of painted lines is strongly recommended; Sidelines, Goal lines, End lines, Midfield Line, 12-yard try markers (no more than 2 yards long and in the centre of the field) and 5-yard lines (hashed line across the field, marking the start of the no-run zones).

d. Hash marks 23 feet wide may be marked on the field and their position indicated by pylons or cones placed at least 3 feet behind the end lines. Otherwise, an unmarked line running down the centre of the field shall be indicated by a pylon or cone placed at least 3 feet behind the end lines and at the end of every play, the ball's lateral position shall be relocated to the centre of the field.

## Goals

ARTICLE 5. There shall be no goal posts.

## Line to Gain

ARTICLE 6. There shall be no line to gain indicators. The use of a down box is recommended.

## **The Ball**

ARTICLE 7. The ball shall be that mandated by the competition authority and shall be appropriate for the participants of the competing teams. Teams may use their own footballs when they are in possession, provided they are legal. Ball persons are not required.

## **Blitz, No Run Zone and Legal Forward Pass Play**

ARTICLE 8. The following definitions of a blitz, the no-run zone and a legal forward pass play shall apply.

a. A blitz is when a Team B player crosses the neutral zone:

1. While the ball is live.
2. Before a change of team possession.
3. Before the player who receives the snap has given up, or simulated giving up, initial possession of the ball.

b. Only one Team B player is eligible to blitz during a down. Prior to the snap, they must be lined up either:

1. In a three or four-point stance, within one yard of the line of scrimmage, and immediately opposite the ball. If there is such a player, they are the only player eligible to blitz. A player is considered to be in a three or four-point stance if one or both of their hands are touching the ground.
2. In Team B's backfield not less than seven yards deep from the neutral zone.

### **PENALTY -**

**Five yards from the previous spot.**

3. If the player who receives the snap fumbles and the ball touches the ground, or if the snap is muffed and touches the ground, any Team B player may blitz.

c. Team B shall not engage in any tactic designed to confuse Team A as to the identity of the legal blitzer after the ball becomes live, or any other tactic that violates the spirit of this rule.

### **PENALTY -**

**Live-ball foul. Ten yards from the basic spot. Automatic first down for Team A if not in conflict with other rules. Flagrant or persistent offenders, including coaches who sanction the use of such tactics, shall be disqualified.**

## **No Run Zone**

ARTICLE 9. a. The no run zone is established when the ball becomes dead and is located so that any part of the ball is on or inside Team B's 5-yard line. When the line of scrimmage is in the no run zone, Team A must execute a legal "forward pass play", unless the ball becomes dead behind the line of scrimmage.

b. A legal "forward pass play" is the interval between the snap and when a legal forward pass as defined by Article 20;

1. is completed, intercepted or first touched beyond the line of scrimmage.
2. is touched or intercepted by the defense behind the line of scrimmage.
3. falls incomplete.

## **PENALTY –**

**Loss of down at the previous spot.**

## **Kicks**

ARTICLE 10. There shall be no kicking of the football. If the ball is punted, place-kicked, or drop-kicked, it is dead. If a loose ball is kicked it remains live.

## **Game Clock/Playing Time**

ARTICLE 11. The game clock is any device under the direction of the appropriate official used to time the duration of the game.

a. The duration of the game may be varied by competitions.

b. The total playing time (excluding extra periods) shall be 30 minutes divided into two halves of 15 minutes each (unless varied according to Article 11-a). The half-time interval shall be 5 minutes.

c. The clock shall start on the first snap of the game.

d. Outside the last two minutes of a half, the clock shall normally only be stopped for charged team timeouts, penalty enforcements, changes of possession, at the end of a down in which a safety is scored or after a try down. The clock shall continue to run after a play in which a touchdown is scored until the try down has been completed. The Referee shall declare and charge themselves with a timeout if an injured player requires one. The Referee may also declare and charge themselves with a timeout if there is a significant delay in spotting the ball for the next down, or for any contingency not elsewhere covered by the rules.

e. After a charged team timeout, change of possession or Referee's timeout after a delay of game foul, the clock starts on the snap. After any other timeout, the clock starts on the ready-for-play signal.

f. When the ball is dead and two minutes or less remain in a period, the Referee shall order the clock stopped (if necessary) to inform the Head Coach and field captain of each team. The play clock may be interrupted to give the two-minute warning. The clock shall start on the snap.

g. After the two-minute warning, normal game timing applies. Refer to IFAF Rule 3 for when to start/stop the clock.

h. Competitions may adopt regulations for either normal game timing or a running clock (as defined in c. to f. above) for the entirety of the game. In either case, the Referee shall still issue the two-minute warning.

### **Play Clock**

ARTICLE 12. The play clock is any device under the direction of the appropriate official used to time the interval between the end of the previous play and the ball being put into play again legally OR an interval between the ready for play signal and the ball being legally put into play.

a. 40-second clock;

1. When an official signals that the ball is dead, the play clock shall begin a 40-second count.

2. If the 40-second clock does not start or the count is interrupted for reasons beyond the control of the officials or the play-clock operator (e.g. clock malfunction), the Referee shall stop the game clock and signal (both palms open in an over-the-head pumping motion) that the play clock should be reset at 40 seconds and started immediately.

3. In the event that the 40-second clock is running and the ball is not ready to be snapped after 20 seconds into the count, the Referee shall declare a timeout and signal that the play clock be set at 25 seconds. When play is to be resumed, the Referee will give the ready-for-play signal [S1] and the play clock shall begin the 25-second count. The game clock will start on the snap unless it had been running when the Referee declared a timeout; in that case, it will start on the Referee's signal.

b. 25-second clock; If the officials signal the game clock to be stopped for any of the following reasons, the Referee shall signal (one open palm in an over-the-head pumping motion) that the clock should be set at 25 seconds:

1. Penalty administration.

2. Charged Team (or Media) Timeout.

3. Injury timeout for a player of the offensive team only. The play clock is set to 40 seconds for an injury to a player of the defensive team.

4. Team B is awarded a first down.

5. Start of each half.

6. Start of a team's possession series in an extra period.

7. Other administrative stoppage.

8. An offensive player's helmet comes completely off through play. The play clock is set to 40 seconds if the helmet comes completely off a player of the defensive team.

When play is to be resumed, the Referee will give the ready-for-play signal [S1] and the play clock will begin the 25-second count.

## **Start of each Half**

ARTICLE 13. Each half shall start with a snap from the offensive team's 5-yard line.

a. Before the game, the Referee shall toss a coin at midfield, in the presence of not more than two captains from each team and another game official, first designating the captain of the visiting team to call the coin toss.

b. The winner of the coin toss has one of the following choices.

1. Start the first half OR second half on offense (not both).
2. Which end of the field they will defend.

c. The losing captain will make their choice from the remaining option.

d. The second half will start with teams defending opposite goal lines.

## **Timeouts**

ARTICLE 14. a. Each team is entitled to two charged team timeouts during each half. During extra periods, each team shall have one charged timeout per period. Charged timeouts may not be retained into the succeeding half or extra period.

b. Charged timeouts shall last no more than 60 seconds.

## **Putting the ball in Play**

ARTICLE 15. The ball shall be legally put in play before the 40/25-second play clock reaches :00.

## **PENALTY -**

**Dead-ball foul. Five yards from the succeeding spot.**

1. Penalty administration.
2. Charged team timeout.
3. Injury timeout for a player of the offensive team only. The play clock is set to 40 seconds for an injury to a player of the defensive team.
4. Team B is awarded a first down.
5. Start of each half.
6. Start of a team's possession series.
7. Other administrative stoppage.

## **Downs**

ARTICLE 16. Team A has four downs to progress to the midfield line. If successful, they shall have a new series of four downs to score.

- a. At the start of a half, the team with the right to start the half takes possession at its own 5-yard line.
- b. After a try down, the team that conceded the touchdown takes possession at its own 5-yard line.
- c. After a safety, the team that scored the points takes possession at its own 5-yard line.
- d. After a touchback, the team awarded the touchback takes possession at its own 5-yard line.
- e. After a down in which there is a change of possession, the team in possession at the end of the down starts a new possession series at the succeeding spot.
- f. If Team A fails to achieve the line to gain after fourth down with no change of team possession, Team B shall take possession at its own 5-yard line.

## **Backward Passes and Handoffs**

ARTICLE 17. Backward passes and handoffs are permitted as follows;

- a. The ball carrier may pass the ball backwards at any time, except to throw the ball intentionally out of bounds to conserve time.
- b. Prior to a change of possession, a ball carrier may hand the ball in any direction to another Team A player only if both are behind their own scrimmage line.

### **PENALTY -**

**Five yards from the previous spot.**

## **No Advance**

ARTICLE 18. Prior to a change of possession, the Team A player who first possesses the snap (or subsequent backward pass) may not advance the ball beyond the neutral zone until the ball has been in the possession of another player.

### **PENALTY -**

**Loss of down at the previous spot.**

## **Numbering and Formations**

ARTICLE 19. a. No two players of the same team shall wear an identical number during any scrimmage down.

b. Team A must have at least two players legally positioned on their scrimmage line when the snap starts. One other player may (if desired) be in position to receive a hand-to-hand snap. There are no restrictions on the position of the other players, provided they are on their side of the neutral zone.

c. A Team B player lined up immediately opposite the ball must be in a three- or four-point stance (must have one or both hands touching the ground as per Article 8.b.1). If a defensive player is lined up immediately opposite the ball without at least one hand touching the ground prior to the snap, the defense is guilty of a foul for illegal formation.

Apart from the rules regarding a player being eligible to blitz, there are no other restrictions on other Team B players providing they are on their side of the neutral zone.

### **PENALTY -**

**Five yards from the previous spot.**

## **Forward Passes**

ARTICLE 20. Team A may make one forward pass during each down before team possession changes, provided the pass is thrown from a point in or behind the neutral zone – any Team A player may throw a forward pass.

a. The player who receives the snap has 7 seconds to give up initial possession of the ball. When they do so, the 7 second limit no longer applies. The ball is dead if the player who receives the snap exceeds the 7-second limit. If in doubt, the 7-second has not been exceeded. (Exception: If the actions of an illegal blitzzer cause the limit to be exceeded, the ball is dead but there is no foul for exceeding the limit.)

### **PENALTY -**

**Loss of down at the previous spot.**

b. The passer may legally throw the ball away to avoid loss of yardage or a 7-second foul if the ball lands or would have landed in or past the neutral zone extended. If the ball does not reach the neutral zone, or would not have reached it, a receiver must have had a reasonable opportunity to catch the ball.

### **PENALTY -**

**Loss of down at the spot of the foul. Safety if the foul is behind Team A's goal line.**

c. No player shall throw an illegal forward pass as defined by Rule 7-3-2 (Exceptions: Rule 7-3-2-f does not apply when a running clock is in force, 7-3-2-g & 7-3-2-h are already modified under Article 20-b).

### **PENALTY -**

**Five yards from the spot of the foul; also loss of down if by Team A before a change of possession.**



## Eligibility to Touch a Forward Pass

ARTICLE 21. At the snap, all players are eligible to touch a forward pass. (Exception: The passer is not eligible to touch a forward pass until it is touched by Team B or an official.)

## Scoring

ARTICLE 22. The point value of scoring plays shall be:

Touchdown	6 points
Safety (points awarded to opponents)	2 points
Successful Try Touchdown (from 2-yard line)	1 point
Successful Try Touchdown (from 5-yard line)	2 points
Successful Try Touchdown (scored by Team B)	2 points
Safety during try (point awarded to opponents)	1 point

NOTE: The try will be from the 2-yard line unless the captain or Head Coach of the scoring team informs the Referee that it will be from the 5-yard line. This option must be chosen before the ball is made ready for play.

## Personal Fouls/Holding

ARTICLE 23. No person subject to the rules shall commit a personal foul before the game, during the game or between periods.

a. All fouls in this section and any other acts of unnecessary roughness are personal fouls. The penalties for all personal fouls (unless noted) are as follows:

### PENALTY –

**Live Ball 10 yards. Penalties for Team A fouls behind the neutral zone are enforced from the previous spot, safety if the foul occurs behind Team A's goal line. Automatic first down for fouls by Team B if not in conflict with other rules. For dead-ball fouls, 10 yards from the succeeding spot. Automatic first down for fouls by Team B if not in conflict with other rules.**

b. There shall be no clipping at any time. (Exception: Against the ball carrier or simulated ball carrier).

c. There shall be no blocking below the waist at any time. (Exception: Against the ball carrier or simulated ball carrier).

d. There shall be no blocking in the back at any time. (Exception: Against the ball carrier or simulated ball carrier).

e. There shall be no holding at any time. (Exception: Against the ball carrier or simulated ball carrier).

f. No player shall target and make forcible contact against an opponent with the crown (top) of their helmet. When in question, it is a foul.

g. No player shall target and make forcible contact to the head and neck area of a defenseless opponent with the helmet, forearm, hand, fist, elbow or shoulder. When in question, it is a foul. (Rule 2-27-14 defines a defenseless player/opponent).

**PENALTY –**

**In addition to the 10-yard penalty for 23-f and 23-g, automatic disqualification.**

**Penalty Enforcement**

ARTICLE 24. a. There are no 15-yard penalties. All penalties that in 11-a-side football carry a 15-yard penalty shall carry a 10-yard penalty in 5-on-5 football.

b. Any penalty may be declined, but a disqualified player must leave the game whether the penalty is accepted or declined.

c. No distance penalty shall exceed half the distance from the enforcement spot to the offending team's goal line. (Exception: Defensive pass interference.)

d. Possible enforcement spots are: the previous spot, the spot of the foul, the succeeding spot and the spot where the run ends.

e. For many fouls, the enforcement spot is specified in the statement of the penalty. When the enforcement spot is not specified in the statement of the penalty, the enforcement spot is determined by the Three-and-One Principle (Rule 2-33):

1. When the team in possession commits a foul behind the basic spot, the penalty is enforced at the spot of the foul.
2. When the team in possession commits a foul beyond the basic spot, the penalty is enforced at the basic spot.
3. When the team not in possession commits a foul either behind or beyond the basic spot, the penalty is enforced at the basic spot.

f. The following are modified basic spots from Rule 10-2-2-d:

1. Running plays when the run ends in the end zone after a change of team possession (not on a try).
  - (a) 5-yard line, when a foul occurs after a change of team possession in the end zone and the result of the play is a touchback. [Replaces 10-2-2-d-2-a]
2. Pass plays. [Replaces 10-2-2-d-3, refers to 10-2-2-e]
  - (a) Previous spot, on plays outside the no-run zone in which there has been a legal forward pass.
  - (b) Previous spot, on legal "forward pass plays" when the no -run zone provisions apply.
  - (c) 10-2-2-e-1 and 10-2-2-e-2 applies both outside the no-run zone and when the no run zone provisions apply.

g. The enforcement spot for any dead-ball foul is the succeeding spot.

h. When an accepted penalty moves the ball over a marked line on the field:

1. If the goal line is the line to gain and enforcement of a Team A penalty moves the ball back across the midfield line, the goal line remains the line to gain.
2. If the midfield line is the line to gain and enforcement of a Team B penalty moves the ball across the midfield line, the goal line becomes the new line to gain and Team A are awarded a first down by distance.
3. If the ball is snapped in the no-run zone and enforcement of a Team A penalty moves the ball outside the no-run zone, Team A must still execute a legal forward pass play during any subsequent down until a down free from Team A fouls leaves the ball outside the no-run zone.
4. If the ball is snapped outside the no-run zone and enforcement of a Team B foul moves the ball inside the no-run zone then Team A may execute any legal play during the next down – this privilege is extended if a further Team B penalty is enforced on the subsequent down, but is cancelled if Team A foul.

i. The enforcement spot for live-ball fouls after a change of possession is the spot of the foul. If this spot is behind a goal line, the penalty shall be enforced from the nearest 5-yard line.

j. On the try down:

1. If Team A has elected to go for one point and commits a foul not carrying a loss of down for which the penalty is accepted, the try is repeated after enforcement. Team A must still execute a legal forward pass play and also may not elect to change their decision to attempt a two point try.
2. If Team A has elected to go for two points and accepts a Team B penalty that does not result in an automatic score being awarded which after enforcement leaves the ball inside the no-run zone, then Team A may execute any legal play and a successful conversion will still score two points.
3. If Team A commits any foul carrying a loss of down for which the penalty is accepted, the try is over and any score during the down is cancelled.

**PENALTY -**

**Players or squad members in uniform who commit persistent personal fouls or one flagrant personal foul shall be disqualified.**

k. "Trash talking" (any talking which is deemed offensive, insulting or abusive to officials, opposing players, teams or spectators) or any other act of unsportsmanlike conduct is strongly discouraged. The officials are the sole arbiters of language or gestures that are offensive, insulting or abusive.

**PENALTY -**

**10 yards. Players or squad members in uniform who commit two unsportsmanlike fouls or one flagrant unsportsmanlike foul shall be disqualified. Coaches who sanction the use of unfair tactics, or who violate these sportsmanship rules, shall be disqualified.**

l. Any person disqualified from a game will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action. Any person subject to the rules may be disqualified and may not participate further in the game in any capacity.

## **Rosters**

ARTICLE 25. Both teams shall submit roster forms for any game they play in, subject to the rules of the competition. A common roster for games played in a tournament format is acceptable if allowed by competition rules. Persons subject to the rules who are required to appear on the roster form and do not shall be disqualified upon discovery.

## **PENALTY - Disqualification.**

## **Extra Periods**

ARTICLE 26. If the score is tied after two periods, competitions may mandate the use of extra periods. If not, the game is over and the result stands as a tie. Extra periods shall be based on the NCAA tiebreaker system detailed in Rule 3-1-3 with the following modifications.

a. The Referee shall toss a coin at midfield in the presence of no more than two field captains from each team and another game official, first designating the field captain of the visiting team to call the coin toss. The winner of the toss may not defer their choice and shall choose one of the following options:

1. Offense or defense to start the first series of the first extra period.
2. Which end of the field shall be used for both series of that extra period.

b. The loser of the toss shall exercise the remaining option for the first extra period and shall have the first choice of the two options for subsequent even-numbered extra periods.

c. An extra period shall consist of two series with each team putting the ball in play by a snap from the midfield line.

d. Each team has four downs to score. The ball remains alive after a change of team possession until it is declared dead and the series is over. Team A may only have a new series of downs if Team B commits a foul that mandates an automatic first down.

e. Beginning with the second extra period, team scoring a touchdown must attempt a two point try. A one point try by Team A (although not illegal) will not score a point.

f. Beginning with the third extra period, a team's possession series will be one play for a two-point try from the five-yard line, unless relocated by penalty.

g. Extra periods will continue to be played until there is a winning team.

h. The team scoring the greater number of points during the regulation and extra periods shall be declared the winning team.