



Wheelchair American Football Rules

WHEELCHAIR AMERICAN FOOTBALL RULES





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Wheelchair American Football Diversity Statement

British Wheelchair American Football is committed to the principle of equality of opportunity, and inclusion, we aim to ensure all participants, members, officials, coaches, competitors and volunteers are treated fairly and on equal basis irrespective of ethnic origin, colour, race, nationality, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, parental or marital status, pregnancy, class or social background, trade union membership or political belief.

The complete list of beliefs are in the BAFA Regulations found below.

<http://rules.bafra.info/rulebook/bafa2022/regulations.pdf>

Introduction

This is the Official Playing Rulebook for the BAFA Wheelchair American Football League, it contains current rules governing the playing of wheelchair American football for the British League.

Our aim is to develop the sport across the UK to offer the opportunity for people with and without disability to participate together in sport without barriers.

Any coaches or officials looking for further explanation can contact the BAFA official representative at: WheelchairFootball@BritishAmericanFootball.org

If any rule in this rulebook is unclear, interpret it according to the current edition of the BAFA Contact Football Rules and Interpretations.



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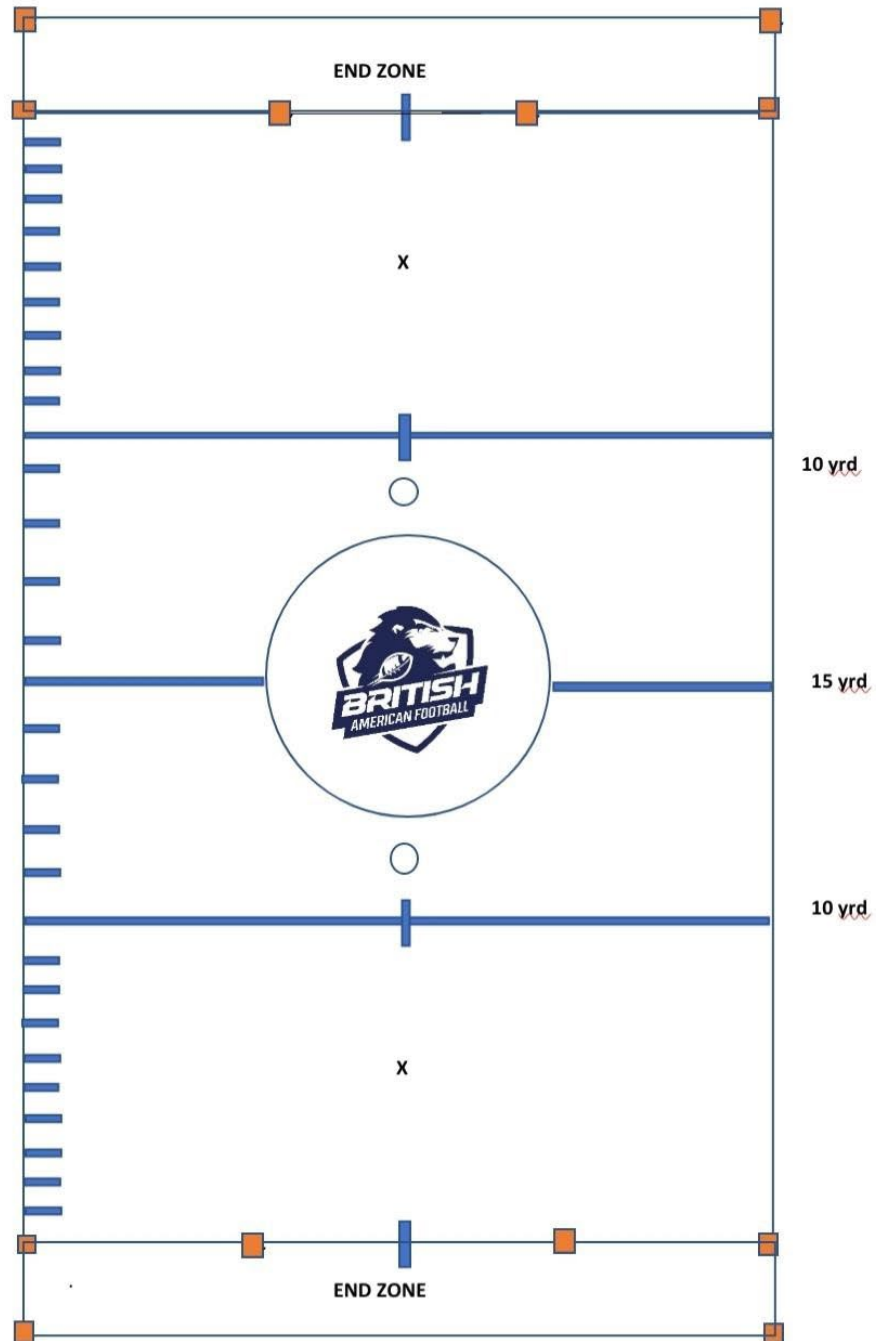
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1 Field markings



1. **PLAYING LINES.** The game shall be played upon a rectangular field, 30 yards in length and 16 yards in width. The lines at each end of the field are termed end lines. Those on each side are termed sidelines. Goal lines marked by the 2 orange inner pylons shall be established in the field 8 yards from and parallel to each end line. The area bounded by



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goal lines and sidelines is known as the field of play. The areas bounded by goal lines, end lines, and sidelines are known as the end zones.

2. The field includes the Field of Play and the End Zones. The field must be a flat, smooth surface with no large cracks or gravel that would cause an unsafe environment for a wheelchair user traveling at high speeds.
3. At intervals of 10 yards, and at the 15-yard centre line, yard lines parallel to the goal lines shall be marked in the field of play.
4. All lines should be laid out to dimensions shown on the plan, with all lines being straight, and using a colour that is clearly visible and contrasts with any surface markings already on the field area.
5. Care must be exercised in any end zone marking, decoration, or club identification at the 15-yard centre line, so that said marks or decorations do not in any way cause confusion as to delineation of goal lines, side lines, and end lines. Only competition and team logos may appear on the field, but may not touch any other field marking.
6. All lines should be a minimum 2 inches wide.
7. All lines should be marked with a material that is not injurious to eyes or skin.
8. Boundary lines, goal lines, and marked yard lines (10-yard lines on both ends and 15-yard line) should be continuous lines.
9. The four intersections of goal lines and sidelines must be marked at inside corners of the end zone and the goal line by pylons placed at the inside edges of the white lines and not touching the playing field itself.
10. Short yard-line extensions should be marked each yard on at least one side of the field. See field diagram.
11. The try spot should be marked with an "o" 12 yards from each goal line in the centre of the field, as shown on the field diagram
12. The kickoff spot should be marked with an "x" 6 yards from the goal line in the centre of the field, as shown on the field diagram
13. For safety, care should be taken to allow as much space as possible from the sidelines to any benches or rigid fixtures. Please make use of the maximum distance from the sidelines, and keep this area clear of any obstructions during play.
14. Wherever possible, team areas should be on opposite sidelines, and can be situated anywhere between respective 5-yard lines.
15. At the option of the home team, both team areas may be located on the same side of the field. In such a case, each team area shall start at the 12-yard line and continue towards the adjacent goal line. When both team areas are so located, the down marker will be operated during the entire game on the opposite side to the team areas.
16. All measurements are to be made from the inside edges of the line marking the boundary lines. Each goal line marking is to be in its end zone so that the edge of the line toward the field of play.



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2 Minimum medical requirements

All games must have a qualified professional practitioner available to provide first aid to both teams and officials if needed.

1. BAFA defines three levels of healthcare practitioner:
 - a. An emergency first-aider (EFA) is defined to be someone who:
 - (i) Holds a Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) (or NQF or QCF or Scottish/Welsh equivalents) Level 3 first aid qualification.
 - b. A first-aid trained therapist (FTT) is defined to be a professional practitioner who meets the requirements below.
 - (i) The person must:
 1. Be a graduate in an appropriate discipline.
 2. Be a registered member of an appropriate professional body.
 3. Possess professional indemnity insurance (particularly if they are working outside the NHS).
 4. Hold a RQF Level 3 or higher first aid qualification.
 - (ii) Persons in the following categories who also have appropriate experience and training in immediate care (as represented by a RQF Level 3 first aid qualification) are likely to meet the requirement:
 1. Doctor registered with the GMC.
 2. Nurse registered with the NMC.
 3. Physiotherapist registered with the HCPC.
 4. Paramedic registered with the HCPC.
 5. Sports rehabilitator registered with BASRaT.
 6. Sports therapist who is a full member of the Society of Sports Therapists, the Sports Therapy Association or the Sports Therapy Organisation.
 7. Osteopath registered with the GOC.
 8. Chiropractor registered with the GCC.
 - c. An immediate care practitioner (ICP) is defined to be someone who meets the criteria for a first-aid trained therapist, plus:
 - (i) They have a qualification from a course endorsed by the Faculty of Pre-Hospital Care (<https://fphc.rcsed.ac.uk/course-endorsements/commercial-and-voluntary-courses> or <https://fphc.rcsed.ac.uk/course-endorsements/corporate-organisations>).
2. The minimum medical facilities during a game are:
 - a. At least one first-aid trained therapist or immediate care practitioner must be available.
 - (i) Any role can be performed by a volunteer within the club or someone hired for the purpose. A practitioner must not be a squad member. An EFA may be a coach.

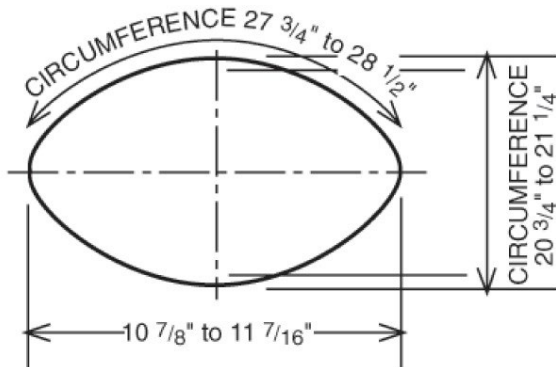
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(ii) The lead ICP or FTT must have carried out a risk assessment (or agreed to game management's) and determined that they are competent and equipped to carry out emergency life saving.

- b. A suitable first aid kit, approved by the lead ICP or FTT must be available.
- c. A telephone capable of use to summon the emergency services must be available.

NOTE: Available means at the side of the field, ready immediately and fit for use.

3 The ball



1. The ball must meet the following specifications:
 - a. New or nearly new. (A nearly new ball is a ball that has not been altered and retains the properties and qualities of a new ball).
 - b. Cover consisting of four panels of pebble-grained leather without corrugations other than seams.
 - c. One set of eight equally spaced lacings.
 - d. Inflated to a pressure of $12\frac{1}{2}$ to $13\frac{1}{2}$ pounds per square inch.
 - e. Conforms to the maximum and minimum sizes of: long axis, $10\frac{3}{4}$ to $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches; long circumference, $27\frac{3}{4}$ to $28\frac{1}{2}$ inches; short circumference, $20\frac{3}{4}$ to $21\frac{1}{4}$ inches
 - f. Weight, 14 to 15 ounces
2. The referee shall be the sole judge as to whether all balls offered for play comply with these specifications. A pump is to be furnished by game management, and the balls shall remain under the supervision of the officials throughout the game.
3. Game management will make at least 3 balls available for testing by the officials no later than 30 minutes prior to the starting time of the game. In the event that fewer than 3 legal balls are supplied, the officials may secure further balls from the away team and, failing that, use the best available ball(s). Management must also provide 2 ball persons, 1 for each sideline, each to keep hold of a replacement ball. These persons are the responsibility of game management (normally the home team), who must make them available at least 15 minutes prior to the scheduled game time.

4 Players and uniform

1. Each team must consist of a minimum of 10 squad members.



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2. Each team shall have a maximum of 7 players on the field at one time. There are no limits on substitutions. A maximum of 1 non-disabled player may be on the field at one time on each team.
3. Players can be of any gender who may or may not have a physical disability: they may walk unassisted, use a device or use a chair.
4. All players must use a wheelchair to play, and have secured both a lap strap and foot strap.
5. Players must not raise both hips simultaneously from the chair to gain an advantage during play. Raising one hip as a result of reaching for the ball or to make a tackle is acceptable.
6. All players must wear a mouthpiece when on the field.
7. Players are permitted to wear additional protective items, such as gloves, upper and lower arm protection/pads, rib protectors and neck protection, as long as they are made for the use of American football, or for medical purposes.
8. Traditional shoulder pads are prohibited for safety reasons, due to the difference in the sport compared to full contact American football.
9. Each player on the same team must wear the same colours on their uniform as all other players on their team. Home teams would need to change to their alternative jersey colour if the visiting team is wearing a similar colour. This should be arranged by club management prior to game day.
10. Numerals on the front of jerseys should be of a size that it is clearly visible by officials, recommended to be a minimum of 8 inches high. The numeral colour must be in distinct contrast with the colour of the jersey.
11. Pants or shorts must be worn during play.
12. Shoes should have closed toes to protect the wearer's feet. Cleats or any footwear with studs or blades are prohibited, footwear must have flat soles or be specific for wheelchair sports, or those used with prosthetic limbs.

5 Game clock

1. The maximum total playing time in a game is 60 minutes, split into 4 equal periods of 15 minutes. Competitions may set a shorter maximum playing time.
2. Before the game starts, the referee may shorten playing time if there are conditions that limit its duration (e.g. field availability). The four periods must be of equal length.
3. Any time during the game, playing time may be shortened by mutual agreement of the referee and both head coaches.
4. The clock will stop for a 2-minute interval between the 1st and 2nd periods, and between the 3rd and 4th periods. There will also be a 15-minute intermission between the 2nd and 3rd periods.
5. The clock will be stopped for a team timeout, an injury timeout, to complete a penalty or at the referee's discretion. The clock will be restarted when the referee signals the ball ready.



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6. If a player is injured or a wheelchair requires repair, an official shall declare an injury timeout and the player must leave the game. The player must remain out of the game for at least one down. An injured player cannot return until he receives approval from medical personnel.
7. An official shall notify both teams when approximately 2 minutes remain in each half.

6 Downs and advancement

1. A series of up to 4 consecutive downs is awarded to the team that is next to put the ball in play at the start of a period or after a change in possession.
2. A new series will be awarded to it if it is in legal possession of the ball on or beyond its line to gain.
3. A new series will be awarded to the opponents if after 4th down, the team has failed to earn a first down.
4. The line to gain for a series shall be established 10 yards in advance of the most forward point of the ball. If this line is in the opponent's end zone, the goal line becomes the line to gain.
5. The official line-to-gain (yardage chain) and down indicators shall be operated outside the sideline.
6. The yardage chain shall join two rods not less than 5 feet high, the rods' inside edges being exactly 10 yards apart when the chain is fully extended.
7. The down indicator shall be mounted on a rod not less than 5 feet high.
8. It is the responsibility of the home team to provide officials' assistants to operate the down box and stake operators. They must be made available to the officials at least 15 minutes prior to the start of the game.

7 Live and dead ball

1. The ball becomes live when the snapper passes the ball backwards to a teammate or throws a backward pass. The snap starts when the snapper moves their hand holding the ball.
2. The ball becomes dead (and an official shall blow their whistle) when:
 - a. The ball or the ball carrier's wheelchair touches anything located outside the field.
 - b. The ball touches the ground for any reason.
 - c. An opponent tackles the ball carrier by placing the palm of one hand on the opponent's torso. (The torso is any part of the body below the neck and above the waist.) It is illegal to grab their jersey or any part of the wheelchair.
 - d. An opponent blocks the path of the ball carrier by placing their wheelchair directly in front of the ball carrier's and prevents them from continuing the motion. This is a tackle.
 - e. There is a change of team possession during a try attempt.
 - f. A player's wheelchair topples over or a player falls out of their wheelchair.
 - g. The ball touches anything other than a player or official outside the field of play or end zones. If the ball crosses a sideline, the dead ball spot is the spot where it



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crossed the sideline, except if it is from an incomplete forward pass, in which case the ball is returned to the previous spot.

- h. A stationary player voluntarily gives up the right to advance by holding the ball in the air.

8 Player contact and blocking

1. On the line of scrimmage the defence cannot line up directly opposite the snapper.
2. Players are prohibited from "ramming" wheelchairs from behind or reaching over from behind the player carrying the ball, this would be seen as "clipping" in contact football.
3. Contact to an opponent's body or wheelchair from the side or front is allowed in an attempt to block an opponent or stop the player with the ball advancing down field.
4. Forcible extension of the arm (i.e. shoving) is unnecessary roughness and is a foul.
5. If the tackler does not remain fully seated, when performing the act, or grabs the opponent or their chair prior to the tackle, it is a foul for holding. (Grabbing the opponent or their chair after the tackle to prevent them falling out is encouraged and good sportsmanship.)
6. If opponents contact and continue to push against each other, it is their responsibility to control the chairs to avoid excessive contact. Excessive contact is a personal foul.
7. If a player intentionally takes the ball from a player's lap, it is a foul for unsportsmanlike conduct.
8. It is a foul if the following restrictions on blocking are broken:
 - a. Blocking or colliding wheelchairs from a front angle is legal only if the offensive player's footplate is in front of the defensive player's rear axle. If not, it is a holding foul.
 - b. A player who continues to block or push an opponent after the ball has become dead or player has moved further than 5 yards down the field has committed a personal foul.
 - c. Blocking into the rear of an opponent's wheelchair (large wheels, anti-tip casters or fifth wheel) is a personal foul for "clipping".
 - d. It is a holding foul if the foot platform remains in the opponent's spokes or "locks" chairs, even if accidental.
9. All 4 wheels must remain on the ground at all times, with the exception of when a wheelchair pops a small wheelie when pushing off.
10. If two wheelchairs get locked together (i.e., no motion), the two players may place hands on each other's chairs to enable them to pull apart.
11. The purpose of "tackling" an opponent is to stop the ball carrier from gaining ground and advancing the ball down the field, therefore if a defensive player makes contact with the ball carrier, and cannot stop forward motion this is not deemed a tackle, the player must be able to stop the ball carrier from advancing with the ball. If, for example, a defensive player attacks an advancing ball carrier and collides from the front or side with the force that tips the ball carrier's chair, this is a legal tackle.



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12. If a player "targets" an opponent by striking them intentionally in a dangerous manner, that is a personal foul and the player will be disqualified from the game.

9 Passing

1. All players on the offence are eligible to pass or catch the ball. For example, the QB once they have passed the ball can proceed downfield.
2. There are no restrictions on the number or location of backward passes.
3. A pass is forward if it first touches a player, a wheelchair, an official, the ground or crosses a boundary line beyond where it was thrown. All other passes are backward.
4. It is a foul if a forward pass is:
 - a. the second thrown during a down
 - b. thrown when any part of the passer's wheelchair is beyond the line of scrimmage
5. It is a foul for leaving the field of play if an offensive player voluntarily leaves the field and is the first to touch a forward pass after their return. If the player is forced out by contact with an opponent, they must return into the field as soon as possible.
6. To complete a catch, a player must have all 4 wheels in bounds until the catch is complete.
7. If the ball is intercepted in the end zone, the ball carrier may attempt to advance the ball or stay in the end zone. If the ball is not advanced out of the end zone, it is placed at the x and a new series awarded to that team.
8. If the ball is intercepted during a try attempt, it is dead. If the ball is intercepted during regular play, the team in possession may try to advance the ball.
9. It is a foul for pass interference if (before the pass is touched):
 - a. Before a forward pass is thrown, any defensive player makes contact with an opponent beyond and within 2 yards of the line of scrimmage, unless the opponent is trying to block them.
 - b. While a forward pass is in flight, any player makes contact beyond 2 yards from the line of scrimmage that interferes with a player's ability to complete a catch.
10. It is a foul for intentional grounding when an offensive player, to avoid a loss of yardage, throws a forward pass to an area where there is no receiver.

10 Plays and fumbles

1. A play begins when the snapper passes the ball backwards.
2. Both the offence and defence must have a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 5 players on the line of scrimmage at the start of each play. The minimum for the defence is 2 if the play is declared to be a kick play (see Rule 11 below).
3. Prior to snapping the ball, all team mates must be behind the line of scrimmage and forward facing, apart from the snapper who may line up side-on for a long snap.
4. One player on the offence is permitted to be in motion at the time of the snap. This can be in any direction as long as they do not cross the line of scrimmage before the ball is moved.



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5. If the ball touches the ground or goes out of bounds, then the ball is dead and is spotted at the point it touches the ground or crosses the sideline (exception: incomplete forward pass).
6. If the ball would be spotted in a team's own end zone (other than if the opponents were responsible for it being there), then a safety would be scored. The team conceding the safety will begin a new series of downs from its x spot.
7. Players are allowed to simulate being in possession of the ball.
8. If a player throws a forward pass, the receiver must catch the ball to complete the play. If it misses and touches the floor it is a dead ball, and the ball is spotted at the previous spot.
9. For safety reasons, a fumbled ball becomes dead when touches the ground or goes out of bounds. The only exception to this is if the ball rebounds off a player or chair and is caught by a player of the opposing team.

11 Kicking

1. The game commences with a simulated "kickoff". The kick is replaced by one of the offensive players throwing the ball downfield rather than kicking it.
2. All kicks (e.g. field goal attempts, punts) are simulated by a player throwing a forward pass, but a kick (other than a kickoff) must be declared to the referee prior to the play starting, so the referee can inform the defence of the offence's intention.
3. At the start of a kick play, the defence must have a minimum of 2 players on the line of scrimmage for the formation to be legal.
4. The receiving team may catch the ball in an attempt to proceed up the field. If the ball is not caught, it will be awarded to the defence where it touches the ground, or on the x spot if it comes down beyond the opponent's goal line.
5. If the ball goes out of bounds, it will be spotted where it crossed the sideline.

12 Players leaving their wheelchair

1. If a player falls out of their chair whilst advancing with the ball in their possession, the ball is dead and spotted where it was when they started to fall.
2. All players in possession of the ball must always have both feet on the footplate (disability allowing). If the player's foot touches the floor, play ends at that point.
3. It is the duty of all players to prevent and/or avoid any fallen players. Intentionally contacting a fallen player (other than to help them) is a personal foul.
4. If a defensive player intentionally "falls", it is a foul for unsportsmanlike conduct.
5. If an offensive player falls unintentionally, the ball is dead and will be spotted at the spot where the fall began.

13 Officials

1. All games will be officiated by 3 officials. The officials may be licenced officials or licensed coaches.
2. The crew of 3 consists of (a) referee (b) line judge and (c) back judge.



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3. The line judge will be initially positioned on the sideline in line with the ball prior to it being snapped. They will mark the line of scrimmage with a bean bag and assist the teams in lining up correctly. (This means that there is an area called the neutral zone in between the offence and defence of 11 inches, and no part of any player's body, chair or equipment can protrude into that neutral zone, with the exception of the snapper.)
4. The back judge will be positioned behind the defence. They are responsible for keeping record of the downs and game clock.
5. The referee will be positioned behind the offence. They administer the ball for the snap and signal to start the game clock.
6. All officials are responsible for calling all fouls they observe and for blowing their whistle when the ball becomes dead.
7. Officials are also responsible for reporting any breaches of game management requirements, as well as any disciplinary matters directly to BAFA, and are recorded by BAFRA.
8. Officials will arrive at the venue 90 minutes prior to the game starting, in order to perform their official duties as set out by BAFRA.

14 Fouls and penalties

1. Unsportsmanlike conduct is a foul for any act that interferes with orderly game administration, including:
 - a. Abusive, threatening or obscene language or gestures.
 - b. Provoking ill will or demeaning an opponent or official.
 - c. Intentionally falling out of the player's wheelchair.
 - d. Intentionally pulling an opponent from their wheelchair.
 - e. Stealing the ball from an opponent's lap.
 - f. Using a wheelchair or any other equipment as a weapon.
2. A personal foul is a foul for unnecessary roughness against an opponent.
3. A flagrant foul is defined as:
 - a. physical contact so extreme or deliberate that it places an opponent in danger of catastrophic injury
 - b. unsportsmanlike conduct that involves spitting at an opponent or official, or abuse intended to demean or brutalise
 - c. intentionally contacting a game official
4. All accepted penalties result in loss or gain of yards and a replay of the last down (unless otherwise stated). Any penalty can be declined, in which case the ball will be put in play at the place it became dead.
5. Unless otherwise stated, the enforcement spot for penalties is as follows:
 - a. For fouls that occur at the snap, the previous spot (line of scrimmage).
 - b. For fouls by the team in possession, the spot of the foul or the end of the run, whichever is worse.



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- c. For fouls by the team not in possession, the line of scrimmage or the end of the run, whichever is further. 5-yard penalties also include an automatic first down.
6. **Holding:** 3-yard penalty from the enforcement spot.
7. **Personal fouls (including clipping):** 5-yard penalty from the enforcement spot.
8. **Illegal use of hands:** 3-yard penalty from the enforcement spot, this occurs when a player deliberately places their hand in the face of another player, this can also include the neck area.
9. **Unsportsmanlike conduct:** 5-yard penalty from the enforcement spot. Any player or coach who commits a second unsportsmanlike conduct is also disqualified.
10. **Pass interference** – By the defense, an automatic first down is awarded. For a foul by the offense, 2-yard penalty from the enforcement spot.
11. **Illegal forward pass:** 2-yard penalty from the line of scrimmage and loss of down.
12. **Leaving the field of play:**
 - a. 2-yard penalty from the enforcement spot if a player leaves the field and returns to participate in the play (i.e. catches a pass or tackles a player).
 - b. 5-yard penalty from the enforcement spot if a player intentionally leaves the field and returns.
 - c. There is no foul if the player is forced out of play and returns immediately at the nearest point of entry.
13. **Illegal procedure:** occurring within 2 yards from the line of scrimmage. This would include, rushing the QB, rushing the line of scrimmage to tackle any offensive player. The penalty is:
 - a. for 1st infraction – a warning that this is an illegal procedure and subsequent infractions will incur a penalty
 - b. for 2nd infraction – 2-yard penalty
 - c. for 3rd and subsequent infractions – 5-yard penalty
14. **Delay of game:** 2-yard penalty from the line of scrimmage for any intentional delay.
15. **Intentional grounding:** loss of down at the spot of the foul.
16. **Team area violation:** All coaches and players not on the field must stay within their team area. Penalties for infringement:
 - a. for 1st infraction: a warning that this is a violation and subsequent infractions will incur a penalty
 - b. for 2nd infraction: 2-yard penalty from the line of scrimmage
 - c. for 3rd and subsequent infractions: 5-yard penalty from the line of scrimmage

15 Scoring

1. Touchdown – 6 points.
2. Touchdown on try – 1 point (run); 2 points (pass play).
3. Field goal – 3 Points (offense must inform referee that the play will be a field goal attempt).



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4. Field goal on try – 1 point (offense must inform referee that the play will be a field goal attempt).
5. Safety – 2 points.
6. For a field goal attempt to score, the ball must pass between the two orange pylons in the middle of the goal line, which represent the goal posts. To judge this, one of the officials will be behind the markers to judge whether the ball does pass through. The official's decision is final.

16 Additional information

1. Although it has been mentioned that this discipline is played indoors on a basketball court, this is not a condition of play, merely a suggestion, based on the time of year and surface requirements. Clubs can always use outdoor facilities if they wish as long as the pitch dimensions are followed, and the surface is sufficient and safe for Wheelchair use
2. If using outdoor areas clubs must be aware of bad weather protocols set out by BAFA for the safety of all association members, in particular lightning procedures (see Appendix B of the BAFA Football Rules and Interpretations).