

**Southern Plains Football League (SPFL)**

**Game Play Rules**

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***Section 1.* The Game**

# Subsection 1.1 The Game

1. The game is patterned after American football
2. It is a contest between two (2) teams of nine (9) players.
3. The team scoring the most points at the end of regulation play is the winner. If tied at end of regulation, see Section 4 Subsection 4.2 to determine the winner.

# Subsection 1.2 The Field

## A. Regulation Field

1. The field dimensions can either be 40x80 yards plus 10-yard end zones, 55x80 yards plus 10-yard end zones, 40x100 yards plus 10-yard end zones, or 55x100 yards plus 10-yard end zones. Any dimensions not meeting these must be brought to the SPFL January League meeting for approval or denial.
2. The Team Box is designated 2 yards behind the sideline, between the 25-yard lines.
3. The Restricted area is the two-yard area between the sideline and the team box lines.
4. The field will be properly mowed, with any holes filled and foreign objects removed or covered and protected.
5. At least one goal post of either NFHS Width (23’4”) or NCAA Width (18’6”).
6. Penalty for first reported violation is a warning; second violation will be a 15yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty against the violating team; third violation will be a 15-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty against the violating team and the violating team will be reported to the league staff and will become a traveling team for remainder of the season, including playoffs.

## B. Line Markings

1. The field of play shall be marked every five (5) yards with lines extending from sideline to sideline and parallel to the goal lines.
2. The goal line shall run from sideline to sideline with an imaginary line extending infinitely.
3. All fields will have a Team Box painted on the field from the sideline two yards back into the bench area. Additionally, we enforce the 25-yard to 25-yard players/coaches box. Please extend the 25-yard line of your field 7-10 yards beyond the out of bounds sideline to assist teams in abiding by the rule, if possible. Any violation of the rule will be enforced per NFHS rules. ***C. Notes for Spotting:***
4. When the ball is declared dead, outside the hash marks, the ball will be spotted just inside the hash.
5. When the ball is declared dead between the hash marks, the ball will be spotted at the dead ball spot.
6. When a forward pass is declared incomplete, the ball will be returned to the previous spot.

# Subsection 1.3 The Ball

## A. The Official Game Ball

1. The SPFL Official Game ball will be a Wilson TDS or GST Leather or Composite. Kicker may bring his own ball in for kickoffs, extra points, and field goals – this ball must still be cleared by the officials – who will mark the kicking ball with a “K.” Punts must use the ball that is in play at that point.

# Subsection 1.4 Rosters

## A. Rosters Size/Limit

1. Each team may dress a maximum of fifty (50) players.
2. Teams must abide by SPFL By-Laws as to the proper method of adding players to a roster.
3. The identity of all players may be subject to review by a roster check that can be conducted prior to or during a game at any point. Players found to be playing that are not on a team’s active roster will result in forfeiture of the game and all subsequent penalties as listed in the SPFL By-Laws.

# Subsection 1.5 Referee Clarifications

1. Head Coaches are the only individuals that may request an explanation from the Referee on interpretation or application of rules. A time out must be taken. If it is determined that there was a misapplication of a rule the team timeout shall be withdrawn.

# Subsection 1.6 Player Positions

## A. Offense

1. The offense must have five (5) players on the line of scrimmage with their shoulders substantially parallel to the line of scrimmage.
2. Of the five (5) players, three (3) players are designated as the center and guards (offensive lineman).
3. The center is the player who is over the ball in a position to snap the ball to a back.
4. The gap between downed guard-center-downed guard can be no more than 2 yards. If more than two yards, the offensive team can be penalized for illegal formation. Referees are allowed to use judgment on 2-yard width.
   * Infraction: Illegal Formation (Live ball)
   * Penalty: 5 yards

1. All offensive players must be simultaneously stationary for at least one second prior to any motion, before the snap.
   * Infraction: Illegal Shift (Live ball)
   * Penalty: 5 yards
2. The SPFL does not allow any blocking below the waist. Penalty for an illegal block is 15 yards and a warning; second violation is a 15-yard penalty and game ejection of the player in violation. Player can also then face further discipline from the league to include, but not limited to, further suspension or expulsion from the SPFL and Ejection fines will apply.

## B. Defense

1. A defensive player is on the line of scrimmage if he is within 1 yard of the neutral zone at the snap and inside the invisible box of 6 yards to the left and right of the ball.

# Subsection 1.7 Uniforms

1. Teams shall confirm and certify to the Referee that all players are properly equipped according to the uniform guidelines listed as follows.
2. All players must be numbered 0 through 99. Numbers must be prominently displayed in contrasting color on the front and back of the jersey. Player nameplates are optional.
3. If two (2) players of the same team are to participate in the same game with identical numbers the team must notify the Referee’s and opposing team.
4. Numbers may be changed during a game only in the event of a damaged jersey. However, any changes shall be reported to the Referee and to the opposing team’s Head Coach.
5. Players of opposing teams shall wear jerseys of contrasting colors, and all players on a team shall wear jerseys of the same color and similar design. Such jerseys shall cover all pads worn under the jersey.
6. All players shall wear the following mandatory equipment:
   1. Football pants
   2. a) A Helmet is legal if it has been NOCSAE approved, has a legal facemask and chinstrap. All helmets with face mask visors attached may be any color/tint but must have a speed release clip system. If the visor is not attached via speed release clip system, the visor will have to be removed before said player will be allowed to play or return to play.

2.b) Helmet color, All players on a team must have the same helmet shell color

* 1. Football shoulder pads.
  2. Football Jersey
  3. Mouth guard
  4. Football shoes suitable for football or turf activities.

1. Hip, thigh, tail, and knee pads are HIGHLY recommended, but not mandatory.
2. The Umpire is the sole judge of legal and illegal equipment and shall rule on such without appeal.

# Subsection 1.8 Default to NFHS

A. If there is no reference to a specific rule in this rule book, the default ruling will follow the prior season NFHS Rule Book.

# Subsection 1.9 Referee Crew & Chain Crew

1. Each game shall be worked by a crew of 4 minimum officials, with all the officials being a state certified official in at least Minnesota, Iowa, South Dakota, Nebraska, or Wisconsin.
2. A crew of 5 officials shall be paid $750/game by the host team. If a crew of 4 officials work said game, $187.50/official is paid.
3. The host team shall furnish chains/down markers and sideline markers, scoreboard and all staff to cover those responsibilities.
4. Back Judge Official needs to be the official counting down the play clock with hand up at 5 seconds to go to signal to Offensive team the nearing of the end of play clock.

# Section 2 Scoring

## Subsection 2.1 Points for Scoring

A. The following points are awarded;

1. Touchdown: Six (6) points
2. Safety: Two (2) points
3. Field Goal (3) points
4. PAT From the 3-yard line by scrimmage play: two (2) Points
5. PAT From the 3-yard line by placekick: One (1) point
6. Returned PAT by defense to Team A’s end zone: Two (2) points
   1. If defense gains possession of the ball by fumble recovery or pass interception during a point after touchdown attempt, they may score two (2) points by advancing it into the offensive team’s goal area.
   2. The ball becomes dead at the moment the PAT place kick or dropkick is attempted. Neither team can advance the ball.

# Section 3: TIMING AND TIMEOUTS

## Subsection 3.1 Starting the Game

1. The game shall start promptly at the scheduled time.
2. See Section 8 for appropriate delay or postponement rules.
3. Prior to the start of the game the Captains of both teams shall meet the Referee at mid-field for a coin toss. The Referee or a dignitary shall toss a coin with the visiting team Captain making the call.

The Captain of the team winning the coin toss has the following choices:

1. To receive or kick
2. Which end of the field to defend.
3. Defer choice to Second (2nd) half.

D. Unless the team winning the coin toss defers, the team losing the coin toss shall have first choice at the start of the Second (2nd) half.

## Subsection 3.2 Playing Periods

1. The length of the game is forty-eight (48) minutes of actual playing time, divided into four (4) quarters, each twelve (12) minutes in length. The scoreboard clock is the official time for the game and shall be operated by a timekeeper under the direction of the Referee.
2. Team End Zones shall be changed at the end of the First (1st) and Third (3rd) periods. At the start of the Second (2nd) and Fourth (4th) periods the ball shall be put at a point corresponding exactly to the point at the opposite end of the field where the ball became dead at the end of the previous period. It shall be put into play in exactly the same manner as if play had not been interrupted.
3. The time between the First (1st) and Second (2nd) Quarter and between the Third (3rd) and Forth (4th) Quarter may not be longer than three (3) minutes.
4. Halftime is Fifteen (15) minutes in length unless otherwise approved by the League Office or both teams and officials.
5. Overtime periods are authorized in the event neither team has scored more points than the other at the conclusion of the game.

## Subsection 3.3 Stopping and Starting of the Game Clock

### A. Stopping the Clock

1. Time shall start when the ball is live at the start of each half and shall continue until the ball is ruled dead and an official signals time shall stop.
2. The clock shall be stopped:
   1. For a player injury.
   2. When time expires at the end of each period.
   3. When the Referee signals an Official’s time out
   4. On a change of possession after a scoring series
   5. Upon gain of yardage for a first down, then started upon Referee’s signal for ball ready for play.

### B. Starting the Clock

1. If the clock is stopped for any reason, the clock will normally start again on the ready for play signal of the Referee.
2. If the clock is stopped for any of the following reasons time will start on the snap:
   1. After a delay of game foul.
   2. Following a team timeout.
   3. Following a possession change

#### C. Running Clock

Running time as per MSHSL rules which state, (the clock will run nonstop if a team’s lead is 35 points in the fourth quarter but will operate normally if the margin shrinks to below 30 points.) The team that is behind by 35 or more points can elect to have a running clock once the game has reached the conclusion of the first half. Once the clock has been started, it will continue for the rest of the game. The clock will stop for injuries and for losing team / official time-outs only. Winning team failure to comply may be subject to forfeit. Winning team has no time outs.

## Subsection 3.4 Timeouts

### A. Team Timeout

1. In each half, both teams are permitted three (3) timeouts.
2. A timeout may be requested by a coach or player on the field.
3. A team timeout may be up to sixty (60) seconds in length.
4. During timeouts, one (1) coach may come to the center of the field to consult with his team or the team may assemble in front of the team bench and consult with more than one (1) coach.
5. The game clock will start on the snap following a timeout.

**Section 4: OVERTIME RULES**

All overtime rules will follow NFHS guidelines

# Section 5: LIVE BALL, DEAD BALL, POSSESSION, OUT OF BOUNDS

## Subsection 5.1 Live Ball/Ball in Play

A. The ball is considered live and in play until the ball is dead. An official shall sound his whistle after the ball is dead. The whistle does not kill the ball. The whistle is an aid to assist players in recognizing the fact the ball is dead.

## Subsection 5.2 Dead Ball and End of Down

The ball becomes dead and the down is ended:

1. When a runner goes out of bounds, is held so his forward progress is stopped or when a runner is contacted by an opponent and touches the ground with any part of his body other than his hands or feet. The ball is dead the instant the runner touches the ground. A runner touching the ground with his hands or feet while in the grasp of an opponent may continue to advance.

Note: If, after contact by an opponent, any part of a runner’s leg above the ankle or any part of his arm above the wrist touches the ground, the runner is down.

**EXCEPTIONS:**

1. The ball remains live if, at the snap, a place-kick holder with his knee(s) on the ground and with a teammate in kicking position catches or recovers the snap while his knee(s) is on the ground and places the ball for a kick, or if he rises to advance, hand, kick or pass; or

1. The ball remains live if, at the snap, a place-kick holder with his knee(s) on the ground and with a teammate in kicking position rises and catches or recovers an errant snap and immediately returns his knee(s) to the ground and places the ball for a kick or again rises to advance, hand, kick or pass.
2. When a live ball goes out of bounds.
3. When any forward pass (legal or illegal) is incomplete or is simultaneously caught by opposing players.
4. When any legal free kick or scrimmage kick:
   * 1. Which is not a scoring attempt, or which is a grounded scoring attempt, breaks the plane of R’s goal line.
     2. Which is a scoring attempt, while in flight touches a K player in R’s end zone, or after breaking the plane of R’s goal line has apparently failed. EXCEPTION: If a scoring attempt kick touches an upright, crossbar, a game official or R player in the end zone and caroms through the goal, the touching is ignored, and the attempt is successful.
5. When any loose ball:
   * 1. Is simultaneously caught or recovered by opposing players.
     2. Is on the ground motionless and no player attempts to secure possession.
     3. Touches, or is touched by, anything inbounds other than a player, substitute, replaced player, a game official, the ground or authorized equipment. In this case the ball will be put in play in accordance with the procedure for an inadvertent whistle as in 4- 2-3b.
6. When the kickers catch or recover any free kick anywhere, and when the kickers catch or recover a scrimmage kick beyond the neutral zone and when the kickers are first (i.e., before any touching by the receivers) to touch a scrimmage kick after it has come to rest beyond the neutral zone and between the goal lines.
7. Following a valid or invalid fair-catch signal given by any R player when a scrimmage kick or free kick is caught or recovered by any R player beyond, in or behind the neutral zone.
8. When any score occurs.
9. During a try if B secures possession or as soon as it is apparent that a kick has failed to score.
10. When a game official sounds his/her whistle inadvertently.
11. When the helmet comes completely off a player who is in possession of the ball.
12. when a quarterback immediately drops to his knee (or simulates dropping to his knee) behind the line of scrimmage

Note: If a quarterback does not immediately drop to a knee, and contact from a rushing defender is unavoidable, it is not a foul unless the defender commits some other act that would constitute unnecessary roughness.

1. when a runner declares himself down by:
   1. falling to the ground, or kneeling, and clearly making no immediate effort to advance
   2. sliding feet-first on the ground. When a runner slides foot first, the ball is dead the instant he touches the ground with anything other than his hands or his feet

Note 1: Defenders are required to treat a sliding runner as they would a runner who is down by contact.

Note 2: A defender must pull up when a runner begins a feet-first slide. This does not mean that all contact by a defender is illegal. If a defender has already committed himself, and the contact is unavoidable, it is not a foul unless the defender makes forcible contact into the head or neck area of the runner with the helmet, shoulder, or forearm, or commits some other act that is unnecessary roughness.

Note 3: A runner who desires to take advantage of this protection is responsible for starting his slide before contact by a defensive player is imminent; if he does not and waits until the last moment to begin his slide, he puts himself in jeopardy of being contacted.

1. when an opponent takes a ball that is in the possession of a runner who is on the ground

Note: An opponent may take or grab a ball (hand to hand) in possession of a runner who is on his feet or is airborne.

# Section 6: Defense

## Subsection 6.1 Defense

***A. Defensive linemen***

Are permitted to stunt, loop, twist, or scrape.

### B. Blitzing

#### 1. Pre-Cadence

Defenses may not line up more than 4 players on the line of scrimmage within the Blitzing Bracket. (NOTE: All players who will be blitzing must be inside the “box” at the start of the cadence. A non-blitzing player, who inadvertently crosses the line and realizing this takes himself out of the play, is typically not penalized.)

* Infraction: Illegal Formation (Dead ball)
* Penalty: 10 yards

#### 2. Post Snap

Defenses may rush as many players as they wish from a Blitzing Bracket formation 12-yards wide (6-yards either side of the ball) and in front of umpire no more than 5yards deep on the defensive side of the ball as long as the players were established inside the “box” when the offense become initially set.

Note: Any players outside the Blitzing Bracket that blitzed would be penalized 15yards for 1st Offense, 15yards and ejection for second offense. Ejection subject to Ejection Fine, see By-Laws.

**3. Post Snap Blitzing Rule ends when**:

* Once the QB becomes a runner
* QB exhibits the intent to run
* QB hands the ball off to another player
* QB goes beyond the width of the blitz box
* Any loose ball from the time of the snap ***C. Targeting Rules:***

1. No Player shall target and initiate contact against an opponent with the crown (top) of his helmet.
2. No Player shall target and initiate contact to the head or neck area of a defenseless opponent with the helmet, forearm, hand, fist, elbow or shoulder.

Penalties for Targeting: When in question, it is a foul!

15 yards from the succeeding spot. Automatic first down for fouls by Defense if not in conflict with other rules. For fouls in the first half:

Disqualification for the remainder of the game. For fouls in the second half: Disqualification for the remainder of the game and the first half of the next game. If the foul occurs in the second half of the last game of the season, players with remaining eligibility shall serve the suspension during the first game of the following season.

3. Definition of Defenseless Player:

* A Player in the act or just after the act of throwing
* A Receiver whose focus in on the act of catching a pass
* A Kicker in the act of or just after the act of kicking the ball
* A Kick Returner whose focus is on the act of catching or recovering a kick in the air
* A Player who is on the ground after a play
* A Player who is obviously out of the play
* A Quarterback after a change of possession

#### D. Defensive Pass Interference & Holding

1. The SPFL enforces defensive pass interference calls with a spot of foul penalty, and automatic First down. If the penalty occurs in the end zone, the ball is placed at the one-yard line. At the referee’s discretion, if the pass is considered uncatchable, pass interference may be reversed or not called at all.
2. The SPFL enforces defensive holding with a 10-yard penalty from the previous spot and an automatic first down.

# Section 7: Special Teams Plays

## Subsection 7.1 Special Teams

### A. Special Teams Plays

1. Special Teams Plays – (i.e. Field Goal Kicks, PAT Kicks, 2pt PAT attempts, & Punts) the SPFL treats these as a normal offensive play and rushing is subject to that of a normal offensive play. No defensive player can make contact with center until player has raised their head into a ready position. See Section 6.
2. Unsuccessful “Field Goal Attempt” untouched by the return team

(Defense) BEYOND THE LINE OF SCRIMMAGE will be placed at the line of

scrimmage. A field goal if blocked, or untouched by return team, or the ball passes the goal line, ball is to be placed at original line of scrimmage. If touched by return team beyond line of scrimmage the ball is placed wherever return team returns to just like a punt. Or If the field goal is blocked and the ball does not cross the beyond the LOS, the ball is placed at the dead ball spot.

1. Kicking Line Formation – Teams may line up no less than 3 players on each side of the kicking formation on kickoffs.

# Section 8: Inclement Weather Game Interruptions/Postponement Rule

## A. Game Not Started

If game has not started and needs to be postponed to another time and or date due to inclement weather, the hosting team must notify the visiting teams immediately and also notify the league commissioner. If the hosting team has lights on the field and a minimal delay lasting no more than 1 hour can result in the game being played, both teams and officials are to remain to play out game. If the hosting team does not have lights on the field, then an alternate date and time must be agreed to by both teams’ officials and the league commissioner to make up the game date.

## B. Game in Progress Before Halftime (Regular Season & Playoff)

If a game has to be terminated and the progress of the game is in that it has not reached halftime, the entire game will be replayed on an alternate date and time that must be agreed to by both teams’ officials and the league commissioner to make up the game date.

### C. Game in Progress After Halftime (Regular Season Game)

If a game has to be terminated and the progress of the game is in that it has surpassed halftime, the game will end with the winning team being the team ahead at the time of termination. If the game is scoreless or a tie, than the game will end in a tie.

### D. Game in Progress After Halftime (Playoff Game)

If a game has to be terminated and the progress of the game is in that it has surpassed halftime, the game will end with the winning team being the team ahead at the time of termination. If the game is scoreless or a tie, the remainder of the game will be played out on an alternate date and time that must be agreed to by both teams’ officials and the league commissioner to make up the remainder of the game.

## E. Championship Game in Progress

If the championship game has to be terminated at any point of the game after opening kickoff, the remaining portion of the game will be played out on the most immediate date that can be agreed to by both teams and approved by the league. If the game has to be continued both teams are only allowed to play the players that were present for roster check at the onset of the initial Championship kickoff.

## F. Heat Related Delay

Prior to the scheduled kickoff if heads of both teams and the officials meet out of concern over the heat index which is measured in Temperature and Humidity, the game can be delayed up to no more than one hour from the scheduled start time to assist in allowing the heat index to lower. Referees are instructed to have an increase in official’s timeouts to allow for water breaks at a minimum of one per quarter or more at their discretion.