



## American Flag Rugby: “Laws of the Game”

### Sportsmanship

The founding tenant of this game that it is a vehicle for teaching and practicing the high ideal of good sportsmanship. Reflecting this importance, sportsmanship will always be the subject of the first and last laws of the game. Participants in Youth Flag Rugby must positively contribute to the game to the best of their ability. Players and Participants must outwardly show the utmost respect for ones self, other participants, fellow players, coaches, referees and administrators of the game. Players and Participants must accept both victories and defeats graciously.

Un-sportsman like conduct will not be tolerated. The referee can award penalties, penalty trys, and declare forfeiture against an offending team for any action or combination of actions deemed inappropriate, dangerous or un-sportsman like, by a player, a coach, a parent, or partisan spectator. The referee may also stop play and order the offending individual ejected from the playing enclosure. If a player is ejected, the player may be replaced. Only if an age and skill appropriate level player is unavailable will a team be allowed to complete a game shorthanded. It is a law of the game that both teams must line up and shake hands (or high five) at the end of each match in a demonstration of good sportsmanship. Flag Rugby begins and ends with good sportsmanship.

### Field and Posts

A Flag Rugby field must be rectangular and should be no larger than on half the size of an available rugby, soccer, or American football field. Dimensions should not exceed 70 yards by 50 yards. Fields should have Posts at either end, however creative use of what is available will govern much of the kicking game.

### Teams

Teams may have Co-Captains, and a coin toss is called by the team that traveled the furthest. Optimal game length: two 10 min. halves (halves can range from 7 to 15 minutes). Swap sides at the half. Optimal number of players: 7 per side, however more or less may be appropriate depending on field size and participation. Number of players on each side should be equal at all times. Mouth guards are encouraged but not required. Glasses may be worn if held on with a protective, behind the head strap. Open substitutions at all breaks in play

*(Note the Team guidelines are intended to create an environment for enjoyable play, and as such are not hard laws. Coaches and ref's are responsible for seeing that everyone plays and has a good time.)*

### Referees:

All inter program matches will be assigned a Referee. While many aspects of the Flag game have the potential to be self-refereeing, an official is still necessary and will give a sense of importance and significance to all participants. Referees should look and act the part, wearing rugby socks, shorts, a collared shirt and come prepared with whistle, watch, coin and scorecard. As in the Adult game, the referee is the final judge of all law and fact, as well as the facilitator of the game. It is the referee's duty to see that matches are as enjoyable as they are competitive. Advantages should be long and clearly favor possession over territory. The referee may choose to insure that humiliating score lines do not occur. Finally, it is the referee that is most responsible for the game being played in accordance with the traditions of respect and sportsmanship that define the senior game.

### Point Scoring

The ball must be touched down (downward pressure from the hand, arm or upper body) in order to score a 5 point try. Conversions are worth 2 points and will be taken quickly. If a player, running with the ball in the field of play tackled and due to excitement, momentum or inattentiveness, is carried over the line and places the ball down, a try is not awarded, but the defending team is awarded a free start from the “22” meter. However, if a player is running and is within 1 meter of the goal line, and has clearly initiated the downward motion with the ball toward the line (ball in motion and below waist level), a try will be awarded even if the flag was removed before crossing the line or touching down. If a ball carrier has entered the in-goal and is running across it in order minimize the kicking angle, the downward motion provision does not apply and a tackle before actual touchdown will result in a “22” meter.



### Running the Ball

Ball carriers must “Run at Spaces, not Faces”. This means that every effort must be made to run around a defender, and may not in any way attempt to run “through” (directly at) a defender. Doing this will be considered barging, a dangerous play that will be quickly penalized.

### The Tackle (“Tag!”)

A tackle is made when a flag is removed. A ball carrier may not in any way attempt to guard or defend their flags; to do so will result in a penalty. The tackler must immediately indicate that a tackle has been made by holding up the flag and calling out “Tag”. It is important that players learn to not call out until they actually have the flag in their hand. The referee may then facilitate play by ordering “pass”.

### The 2 Second Rule (non-ruck play)

Upon hearing the defenders call, the ball carrier has 2 second in which to play the ball. They may stop running first or may pass while in the process of stopping. If the ball is not passed in 2 seconds, a turn over will be awarded to the defenders at the point where the flag was pulled. The 2 second rule will be strictly applied in order to facilitate a “use it or loose it” environment for the game. This will also help avoid situations where a player is available to receive the ball, but the tackled player instead waits to throw it to a more favored teammate. This way everyone gets to play.

### Returning the Flag:

After a tackle, both tackler and tackled player are out of the game until the flag is returned. The flag must be handed to its owner, not thrown on the ground (penalty). The owner must accept the handed flag immediately. The Tackler may re-enter play as soon as the handoff is made. The tackled player may re-enter play as soon as the flag has been re-attached.

### Open Field Kicking

When a ball is kicked to touch: If the kick is taken behind 50(half way line), the lineout is marked where it went out in the air. If the kick is taken in front of the half way line lineout is marked from where the kick was taken.

### Penalties

We hope penalties will be few and far between. Penalties are taken as either a free start (Owls), Toe and Throw pass to a teammate(Falcons), Toe and Throw or kick to touch (Hawks) or a toe and Throw, kick to touch, or drop goal attempt (Eagles). The referee has the option of a 3 minute sin bin for players (yellow card). The offender must remain at the back of the in-goal while their team plays shorthanded. Players may be ejected from the game (red card) for dangerous play, repeated offenses, or for persistent transgressions of the spirit of the sportsmanship as the referee sees fit.

### Off-Sides:

As in the adult game, a tackle sets the offside mark according to which all players must conform in order to continue play. Defensive players must retreat behind the point of the tackle before entering play. Loitering will result in a penalty from the point of the tackle. Loitering and intentionally interfering with play, (poaching from an off sides position or intentional knock-on) will result in a penalty awarded 5 meters in front of the tackle.

### Interfering with the Tackle:

A ball carrier may not in any way interfere with a defenders attempt to grab their flag, and in particular they may not “swat” at the hand that is attempting to get their flag. Players may not spin to avoid a tackle. Waist and shoulder twisting of more than 90 degrees will be penalized.

### Scrum:

All scrums must engage with a full bind contacting all 6 players shoulders. This will prevent the front rows from separating and the Hookers stomping for the ball. Only hookers only may contest and strike for the ball, and only with one foot. Hookers may not attempt to kick the ball thru the opposition’s front row (with out shin guards, this is dangerous play). Excessive kicking or any stomping will be penalized. Not in straights will be looked at liberally in order to give the attacking team reasonable advantage. Scrums may only break once a scrum half or other player has handled the ball.

### Contestable Line Outs

Contestable Line Outs favor the throwing team in that they only become contested should the ball be thrown poorly or be knocked on. Line outs will be two man at all times, never closer than 3 meters from the goal line. The forward jumpers must stand at least 3 meters from the touch line, and at least 1.5 meters apart. The scrum half may cut in and take the short ball, however at all times the ball must travel at least 3 meters before being caught (referees judgment). To be considered in straight, the ball must travel no further off the centerline of the line out than a line directly over the receiving players heads. Defending players may jump for the ball but only straight up and not into the tunnel. The ball becomes contestable only if the ball is thrown to a place where the defending players can catch the ball while not entering the tunnel on the jump. If, during the course of a lineout, the throwing team knocks forward, the defending team will have the right to gather the ball and play on. This will be considered an advantage of possession gained, and no further advantage (advantage of territory) will apply.

### “22 Meter”

There are three situations that would call for the equivalent of a 22-meter drop. For this purpose, the referee should be able to rapidly pace a distance approximating 25% of the field from the goal line. This distance, while not actually 22 meters in length, will maintain its reference to the senior game and be referred to as “the 22”.

1. If an attacking player is already in the in-goal area and is tackled before scoring the try, a 22 meter "free start" will be awarded the defending team. This is a use it or lose it situation, and the downward motion provision does not apply.
2. If an attacking player knocks or throws forward and the ball travels over the goal line, a 22 meter "free start" will be awarded to the defending team.
3. If a defending player in possession of the ball is tackled in their own in-goal area, possession will be awarded to the attacking team for a free start from the 22. This awards the attacking team possession and good field position, while creating running room that a 5 meter scrum would not. This is designed to create a more open and flowing game.

### The Ruck Variation: (Eagle Level Only)

For 2004, Morris Youth Rugby will implement an experimental tackle/ruck sequence for the eagle division. The tackle/ruck transaction will be conducted as follows:

A player is tackled when a flag is removed, and the tackler will indicate this by stopping where the flag was pulled, raising the flag and shouting “flag” or “tag”. The tackler is responsible for setting the mark of the tackle. At this time, all of the defenders teammates must retire to a line 5 yards back from the point of the tackle, or to the goal line, which ever is closest. Tackles made within 3 meters of the goal line will be played 3 meters from the goal line. The ball carrier must immediately return to the site of the tackle and take a position within 1 meter of the mark. Without delay, the ball carrier must then place the ball down in front of themselves and step cleanly over the ball until the ball is behind both feet..

The defender holding the flag must make way for this to happen. During the step over, the ball must be stationary on the ground. At this time, a teammate of the tackled player must arrive and act as scrum half. This player must arrive immediately, and without delay pass the ball to a third attacker to continue play. The scrum half may not run with the ball, and must have one foot or both feet stationary on the ground while the pass is made. A pivot in order to make the most advantageous pass is permissible. Once the tackled player has stepped over the ball, they must immediately accept the return of the flag from the tackler. Once the flag is returned, the tackler must then retreat 5 meters or be put on the sides by his own players advancing from and on the sides position, or by a ball carrier passing the point of the tackle, before attempting to rejoin play. The Tackled player must re-attach their flag before rejoining play. The player who acted as scrum half may rejoin play as soon as they have made the pass.



Ruck Variation Penalties:

1. Failure of defenders to retreat will be considered off sides and will result in a penalty to the attaching team awarded 5 meters closer to the defenders goal line from the point of the tackle.
2. The tackler, when returning the flag must stand and wait for the flag to be taken out of their hand, and not drop the flag or push it on the tackled players body. The flag return transaction is a hand to hand only affair. Either offence will be a penalty restart for the attacking team (already in possession) 5 meters closer to the defenders goal line.
3. Incorrectly setting the mark of the tackle by the tackler in order to gain advantage will be considered poor sportsmanship and a penalty will be awarded, 5 meters closer to the defenders goal line.
4. The ball must be made stationary on the ground during the step over. Rolling the ball backwards will be penalized with a turnover, kicking the ball and causing it to go forward while stepping over it will be considered a knock forward and result in a scrum with the defending team receiving the put in.
5. Scrum half playing the ball other than to pass the ball out will result in a penalty turn over to the defending team.

Questions with rules and conventions of the Game:

Any questions and controversies that arise over the directives presented in these Elements of Play, will be resolved by applying the corresponding or most appropriate Law of the adult game.

## The Divisions: Age Appropriate Variations

The Goal of the Morris Youth Rugby program has always been to introduce young players to the game, instill its traditions of sportsmanship, and have fun. For 2004, we will continue with the successful 4-division format we implemented last year to address the problem of significant age and ability differences within the divisions, particularly among the younger children. Within any division however, highly qualified players (defined as being physically skilled, attentive, and socially capable) should be encouraged and allowed to move up to the next division. This may be done upon unanimous agreement between the older divisions head coach, a parent, and the program administrator.

### The Divisions: Age Appropriate Variations

#### Owls (Division 4) (entering Kindergarten, and 1<sup>st</sup> grade, approx. ages 5-6)

- Turnover/Penalty taken as a standing free pass to restart play. Opposition back 3 meters.
- Place kicks to start halves and after score (scoring team kicks off).
- At all kicks, receiving team must gain possession.
- Five (5) point tries, no conversions.
- No Scrums, knock-forwards result in a turnover from site of knock.
- Uncontested Lineouts, 1 meter space. Throwing team must gain possession.
- No open field kicking.
- Turnover/Penalty taken as a standing free pass to a teammate. Opposition must retreat 3 meters.
- A Coach is allowed on field with players during the game.
- Approximate field dimension: 20m x 30m (1/4 of standard rectangular field)

This is Flag Rugby at its simplest, the rugby version of T-Ball. It is strictly for fun with lots of games and ball chasing exercises. The Owls should have a head coach and an assistant who will lead practices in their absence. Coaches will need to recruit enough parental involvement to keep a ratio of around 5-6 kids to every grown up. These young players will prove full of enthusiasm but with a very limited attention span, so it is important to keep them moving. Not all programs will have an Owls team so games will not necessarily be scheduled for the tournaments, however if enough kids show up, something should always be arranged.

#### Falcon (Division 3) (entering 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, approx. ages 7-8)

- Place kicks to start halves and after score (scoring team kicks off).
- At all kicks, receiving team must gain possession.
- Five (5) point tries.
- Two (2) point conversion taken as a punt directly in front of the posts. The try scorer will take the kick. (Kick optional depending on post availability).
- Uncontested Lineouts, 1 meter space. Throwing team must gain possession.
- No open field kicking.
- Uncontested, no push Scrums. Team with put in gains possession. Full Bind.
- Turnover/Penalty taken as a standing free pass to a teammate. Opposition must retreat 3 meters.
- A Coach is allowed on field with players during the game.
- Approximate field dimension: 25m x 50m (1/3 of standard rectangular field)
- Ball: Number 4 International Rugby Board Standard

The Falcons are a significant step up from the Owls. The falcons will have a much greater attention span and hence will begin to learn some of the conventions of the game. The focus at this age needs to be ball handling, and the fun and skill of moving the ball as a team. For this reason, uncontested scrums and line-outs are added so that the 7-8 year olds begin to learn what the set pieces are, but also will realize they should be avoided because they slow down the running game. Kicking is introduced in the form of punts for conversions, instilling in them the strategic value conversions have on the score line.

## Hawks (Division 2) (entering 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grades, approx. ages 9-11)

- Drop Kicks to start halves.
- Scoring team drop kick to re-start.
- Staying on their feet, the kicking team may contest for ball after it travels 5 meters, however kicks must be made with the intention to turn over.
- Five (5) point tries.
- Two (2) point conversion taken as drop kick opposite the place where the ball was touched down, up to a maximum distance of 5 meters from posts. (Soccer box may serve as hash marks.)
- Conversion should be taken within 30 seconds of the try and restart should be taken within 30 of conversion kick. (Conversion is optional, depending on whether or not the field has posts).
- No push Scrums, contested by the hookers only and with one foot only. Full Bind.
- Contestable two man lineouts, spaced 2 meters apart, no jumping in to the tunnel.
- Open field kicking permitted. Barging will be penalized.
- At penalties, referee will give mark, and opposition must retreat 5 meters. No quick penalties. A Penalty is taken as a tap off the ground and pass to a teammate, or as a kick to touch (kicking team gets the throw).
- Approximate field dimension: 40m x 60m (up to 1/2 of standard rectangular field).

With the Hawks, we introduce the all-important set piece skills of contested scrums and contestable lineouts.

## Eagles (Division 1) (entering 7-9th grades, ages 12-14)

- Drop Kicks to start halves.
- Scoring team drop kick to re-start.
- Staying on their feet, the kicking team may contest for ball after it travels 5 meters, however kicks must be made with the intention to turn over.
- Five (5) point tries.
- Two (2) point conversions taken as drop kick opposite where try was scored.
- Conversion should be taken within 30 seconds of the try and restart should be taken within 30 seconds of a of conversion kick.
- Open field kicking permitted. Barging will be penalized.
- Three (3) point drop goals permit from open field.
- Tackle/Ruck variation will be used for the Eagle Level.
- No push Scrums, contested by the hookers only and with one foot only. Full bind.
- Contestable two man lineouts, spaced 2 meters apart, no jumping in to the tunnel.
- At penalties, referee will give mark, and opposition must retreat 5 meters. No quick penalties. A Penalty is taken as a tap off the ground and pass to a teammate, as a kick to touch (kicking team gets the throw), or as a drop goal attempt.
- Approximate field dimension: 40m x 60m (up to 1/2 of standard rectangular field).
- Penalty taken as tap off the ground, kick to touch, or three (3) point drop kick at goal
- Approximate field dimension: 40m x 60m (up to 1/2 of standard rectangular field) .
- Ball: Number 4 or 5 International Rugby Board Standard.

The Eagle division is the full Flag Rugby Game. It includes many of the conventions of the Adult game while at the same time remaining non-contact to protect them. This game is designed to be played with equal enjoyment by co-ed players from age 12 to ??

## Tournaments and Duel Match Play: Learnings and Best Practices

We learned quite a bit during the summer of 2003. Going forward, one of our goals is to make it easy for other programs to get up and running smoothly, so I thought it was important to share some of what we learned that made those amazing Saturday mornings so much fun.

**Referees:** Each Saturday match should have an assigned head referee for the day. It is that refs job to speak with the Program Administrators from the participating programs (15-20 min before first kickoff if not the night before) and sort out how many teams will be playing in each division, how many fields are available, and establish an agreed upon length of game and number of players per.. The head ref is responsible for the days brackets, field and referee assignments. The head Referee and the two Program Administrators will essentially comprise a committee to decide all matters related to the days play.

**Optimal Length of Game and Number of Players:** Optimal game length we found to be two 10 min. halves, though halves can range from 7 to 15 minutes). Swap sides at the half. Optimal number of players: 7 per side, however as few as 5 or as many as 9 may be appropriate depending on field demands, field size, and whatever concessions are necessary to facilitate maximum participation. But when scheduling the games, it is important to remember that while shorter games may allow more games to be played, it actually reduces the actual playing time the players experience. This is because of more half times and the fact that getting teams on and off the field always takes more time than expected. So if time or field space is tight, we found a good alternative was to go to a 12-18 minute running time game, with only a quick, referee ordered swap of ends at a convenient break in play. It worked well several times last season. A word to referees, ask the coaches to remind you of the swap at about half of the running time. If it's a good game you may need the reminder, and besides the coach with the sun in his players eyes is going to remind you anyway.

**Playing Time of 25-30 Minutes per Player:** It proved desirable that for teams of about 10 players, playing a 7 a-side game, matches be arranged so that the teams get at least 40 minutes of playing time. An example in rough numbers would be: 3 games of 7 min. halves (adding up to 42 minutes); or 2 games of 10 min. halves (adding up to 40 minutes). With proper and fair substitution by the coach, each player will get about 25-30 minutes of running time, enough to send any kid home with a strong sense of having participated. Besides, the teams that win all their games will still have to play in the finals! (Note: 10 min. half games should kick off no less than a half hour apart, and 7 min. half games should kick off no less than 20 minutes apart.)

**Ratio of Grown up to Kids:** What have we heard every year since the beginning Morris Youth Rugby? Parents love the amount of adult supervision they get in this game. The target, for both matches and training sessions should be no more than 10 player to each coach. With the smaller kids, the ratio needs to be even less, (6 to 1 in training was manageable and quickly recruited parents always fill in nicely). We need to remember that Rugby is a players game, so making friends with a grown up who has a passion for the game is so important to the making this a great experience for them. Lets work to keep those ratios as low as possible.

**Coaches:** In a game or tournament situation, every team should have and adult coach (or coop-ed parent) acting as the organizer, cheer leader and person responsible for making sure that all the kids get equal playing time.

**Best Players:** We decided last year that up until the final tournament, players would play on sides by random selection and not selection based on skill and ability. This notion fits well with our relaxed, summer program style and also helped to keep the kids from forming cliques based on talent. For the Junior Jersey cup however, it makes sense to select on merit and allow multiple sub-division play. The kids appreciated this too, and in the end it allowed us to crown bona fide championship teams in each age division.

## Penalty Guide

Non-Offending Team

<u>Infraction</u>	<u>Result</u>	<u>Advantage?</u>
Forward Pass	Scrum to NOT	Yes
Knock forward(including in line out)	Scrum to NOT	Yes
Ball out of bounds on Kick off	Scrum to NOT	No
Out of bounds	Line out to NOT	No
Not in Straight at Lineout	Line Out to NOT	yes
Failure to kick off properly	Repeat/Do over	no
Defender jumping in to Line Out	Penalty	yes
Ball not going 3 meters at lineout	Scrum to NOT	yes
Ball not going 5 meters at kickoff	Scrum to NOT	yes
Failure to Conduct Tackle Transaction	Penalty	no
Flag Guarding	Penalty Turnover	Yes
2 second violation	Penalty Turnover	Yes
Slapping or grabbing Ball	Penalty Turnover	Yes
Spinning (no more than 90°)	Penalty Turnover	Yes
Off Sides	Penalty	Yes
Stomping in Scrum	Penalty	No
Repeated Offences	Penalty/ Sin Bin (3 min)	No
Disrespectful/Foul Play	Penalty/Sin Bin/Ejection	No
Barging, Dangerous or Over Aggressiveness	Penalty/Sin Bin/Ejection	No
Eagle Level: Penalties regarding the Ruck Variation		
Delay in returning to place of tackle	Penalty	No
Fail to make ball stationary before step	Penalty/ Turnover	No
Kick forward during step over	Scrum to NOT	No
Scrum Half not arriving in 2 sec.	Penalty/Turnover	No
Retreating Player Offsides	Penalty 5 meters ahead	No