



2026 Flag Football 3-4 Official Mechanics

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2026 SDCFOA Flag Football Mechanics

1. The uniform will be the same as we use for all high school level games. No shorts will be worn.
2. The use of radios and/or a wireless microphone is the decision of the Referee.
3. The referee will reach out to the crew 24 hours before game time to confirm their assignments.
4. Arrival time is 30 minutes before the start of the contest.
5. Officials should be fully dressed as they go directly to the field.
6. The crew will gather immediately for their pre-game.

CREW PREGAME

1. Confirm position assignments.
2. Confirm responsibilities and duties to be performed during the warm up period.
3. Discuss any new bulletin information from the Instructional Chair.
4. Clarify any rules or mechanics questions.

2026 SDCFOA Flag Football Mechanics – 3 officials

WARM-UP PERIOD

1. The Referee, Line Judge and Head Line-Judge will meet with the head coaches starting with the home team.
 - a. Introductions
 - b. Confirm with both head coaches that everyone is legally equipped? (legal flags? Jerseys tucked in?)
 - c. Discuss the team box and the restricted area with both head coaches.
 - d. Come out on the field to request time outs if necessary.
 - e. Any unusual plays or formations?
 - f. Confirm game time and game clock operator.
 - g. Identify the “Down Box” operator.
2. Head Line-Judge instructs the Down Box operator.
3. Line Judge instructs the timer.
4. All officials evaluate player equipment and correct any equipment or adornment issues.
5. Officials observe the warm-up activities for play and player insights.
6. The crew meets just prior to the coin toss to share information from the meeting with the head coaches, and to review the basic mechanics to be used during the game.

COIN TOSS

1. Referee faces the scoreboard while the Head Line-Judge and Line Judge escort their captains to the center of the field.
2. The Head Line-Judge and Line Judge move opposite the Referee with their backs to the scoreboard.
3. The coin toss procedure is identical to the one used in tackle football but the options of “kick, receive, defer or defend a goal” are replaced with “offense, defense, defer or defend a goal.” There is no specific order used by all Referees.
4. The second half choices are the same as tackle football.

HALFTIME

1. Quickly meet to clarify rules or mechanics issues.
2. Confirm with the crew which team will be on offense.
3. Obtain the choice of direction from the opponent.

SCRIMMAGE PLAY MECHANICS

1. Referee

- a. The Referee will always spot the ball unless another official helps and spots the ball out of convenience. Players do not spot the ball.
- b. Confirm the next down with the Head Line-Judge, and the Line Judge.
- c. Count offense.
- d. Whistle “ready for play” and start your 25-second play clock.
- e. Initial responsibilities are the snap and any movement by the backs.
- f. Rule on progress for plays that end behind the line of scrimmage.
- g. Trail all plays downfield and assist with fouls on, or by, the runner.
- h. When possible, the nearest official to the runner will judge progress when the flag is pulled, and the next nearest official will look for illegal contact.
- i. Observe player movements for screen blocking, illegal contact or fouls against receivers during short routes.
- j. Rule on roughing the passer.
- k. On change of possession, use reverse mechanics to the goal line.

2. Head Line-Judge

- a. Confirms the down with the Referee.
- b. After receiving the signal from the Referee, locates the Down Box at the proper spot and confirm the Down Box is displaying the correct down.
- c. Count defense
- d. Indicate, with your upfield foot, the back of the ball for the offensive players.
- e. Observe the ~~entire~~ neutral zone, on your side of the ball, for violations
- f. Observe initial release to rule on contact created by either team.
- g. Read run or pass
- h. Rule on complete, incomplete and progress spots.
- i. When possible, the nearest official to the runner will judge progress when the flag is pulled, and the next nearest official will look for illegal contact.
- j. You have sideline responsibilities from endline to endline.
- k. Responsible for the goal line and the end line.

3. Line Judge

- a. Responsible for the backup game clock.
- b. Confirm the next down with the Referee and visually confirm the proper down is displayed on the Down Box.
- c. Count defense
- d. Initial position ~~15-20 yards downfield~~ will be at the line of scrimmage indicating, with your upfield foot, the front of the 1-yard neutral zone for the defensive players.
- e. In certain game situations, the Referee may instruct the LJ to start the play with an initial position at the line-to-gain or goal line.
- f. Observe the ~~entire~~ neutral zone, on your side of the ball, for violations
- g. Observe initial release to rule on contact created by either team.
- h. Read run or pass
- i. Rule on complete, incomplete and progress spots.
- j. When possible, the nearest official to the runner will judge progress when the flag is pulled, and the next nearest official will look for illegal contact.
- k. You have sideline responsibilities from endline to endline
- l. Responsible for the goal line and the end line.

GOAL LINE MECHANICS

1. Head Line-Judge and the Line Judge moves directly to the goal line if the ball is snapped on/inside the 405-yard line.
2. Line Judge is on the goal line, if possible, when the ball is snapped outside of between the 6 and 10-yard line.

SCRIMMAGE KICK MECHANICS

1. Referee
 - a. At the conclusion of a 3rd down play that ends short of the line to gain, the referee will turn to the offensive sideline and ask, "Punt or Play?" The flank official on that sideline will ask the same question. If the coach of the team on offense does not answer, the referee will ask one more time. If there is no response, the referee will mark the ball ready for play and the offense must play (not punt) within 25 seconds. If the offense then chooses not to play, they must call a timeout and then declare they wish to punt. Remember, after receiving the snap, the kicker has 5 seconds to punt the ball, or a delay of game penalty will be called, and the clock will start on the next snap. Finally, if the offense declares that they are punting, the referee will mark the ball ready for play (25-second play clock). Then the referee will observe the defense to see if they are substituting as a result of the offense's choice to kick the ball. If they are subbing, the referee will hold up the snap giving the defense adequate time to substitute. But the referee will not hold up the snap beyond the 20-second mark thus giving the offense time to snap the ball and provide the 5-seconds to kick the ball. All of this is necessary to prevent illegal consumption of time by the team ahead in the score.
 - b. Observe the snap, the stationary kicking team players, and the kick.
 - c. Rule on the kick crossing the line of scrimmage or not.
 - d. Use reverse mechanics during the return.
 - e. Signal to the Head Line-Judge to move the Down Box at the end of the play.
2. Head Line-Judge
 - a. Position yourself on your sideline even with the receiver.
 - b. Mark the spot that the kick ends, or the spot of the end of the return.
3. Line Judge
 - a. Position yourself on your sideline slightly deeper than the receiver.
 - b. Allow the returner one opportunity to possess the airborne or grounded kick.
 - c. Mark the spot that the kick ends, or the spot of the end of the return.

PENALTY MECHANICS

1. The crew may use radios to expedite the communication of penalty information and the proper enforcement of the penalty.
2. The Referee marks off all penalties unless another official helps and marches off the ball out of convenience.

AFTER THE GAME

1. The crew immediately leaves the field together and the Referee will lead a post-game discussion.

2026 SDCFOA Flag Football Mechanics – 4 officials (Back Judge)

WARM-UP PERIOD

1. The Referee, Line Judge, ~~and~~ Head Line-Judge, **and Back Judge** will meet with the head coaches starting with the home team.
 - a. Introductions
 - b. Confirm with both head coaches that everyone is legally equipped? (legal flags? Jerseys tucked in?)
 - c. Discuss the team box and the restricted area with both head coaches.
 - d. Come out on the field to request time outs if necessary.
 - e. Any unusual plays or formations?
 - f. Confirm game time and game clock operator.
 - g. Identify the “Down Box” operator.
2. Head Line-Judge instructs the Down Box operator.
3. Line Judge instructs the timer.
4. **Back Judge talks to the QBs to discuss the play clock mechanics**
5. All officials evaluate player equipment and correct any equipment or adornment issues.
6. Officials observe the warm-up activities for play and player insights.
7. The crew meets just prior to the coin toss to share information from the meeting with the head coaches, and to review the basic mechanics to be used during the game.

COIN TOSS

1. The Referee and the Back Judge will meet the captains at the center of the field for the coin toss.
2. Referee faces the scoreboard **and the Back Judge stands opposite of the Referee.**
3. The Head Line-Judge and Line Judge **escort captains from their sideline to the nine-yard marks, the players continue to the center of the field.**
4. The coin toss procedure is identical to the one used in tackle football but the options of “kick, receive, defer or defend a goal” are replaced with “offense, defense, defer or defend a goal.” There is no specific order used by all Referees.
5. The second half choices are the same as tackle football.
6. **After the toss all officials will meet in the middle of the field to record the results.**

HALFTIME

1. **Meet to review the 1st half and quickly clarify rules or mechanics issues.**
2. Confirm with the crew which team will be on offense.
3. Obtain the choice of direction from the opponent.

SCRIMMAGE PLAY MECHANICS

1. Referee
 - a. The Referee will always spot the ball unless another official helps and spots the ball out of convenience. Players do not spot the ball.
 - b. Confirm the next down with the Head Line-Judge **and then the rest of the crew.**
 - c. Count offense.
 - d. Whistle “ready for play” and start your 25-second play clock.
 - e. Initial responsibilities are the snap and any movement by the backs.
 - f. Rule on progress for plays that end behind the line of scrimmage.
 - g. Trail all plays downfield and assist with fouls on, or by, the runner.

- h. When possible, the nearest official to the runner will judge progress when the flag is pulled, and the next nearest official will look for illegal contact.
- i. Observe player movements for screen blocking, illegal contact or fouls against receivers during short routes.
- j. Rule on roughing the passer.
- k. On change of possession, use reverse mechanics to the goal line.

2. Head Line-Judge

- a. Confirms the down with the Referee.
- b. After receiving the signal from the Referee, locates the Down Box at the proper spot and confirm the Down Box is displaying the correct down.
- c. Indicate, with your up-field foot, the back of the ball for the offensive players.
- d. Observe the neutral zone, on your side of the ball, for violations
- e. Observe initial release to rule on contact created by either team.
- f. Read run or pass
- g. Rule on complete, incomplete and progress spots.
- h. When possible, the nearest official to the runner will judge progress when the flag is pulled, and the next nearest official will look for illegal contact.
- i. You have sideline responsibilities from endline to endline.
- j. Responsible for the goal line and the end line.

3. Line Judge

- a. Responsible for the backup game clock.
- b. Confirm the next down with the Referee and visually confirm the proper down is displayed on the Down Box.
- c. Count defense **and confirm with the Back Judge.**
- d. Initial position will be at the line of scrimmage indicating, with your up-field foot, the front of the 1-yard neutral zone for the defensive players.
- e. In certain game situations, the Referee may instruct the LJ to start the play with an initial position at the line-to-gain or goal line.
- f. Observe the ~~entire~~ neutral zone, on your side of the ball, for violations
- g. Observe initial release to rule on contact created by either team.
- h. Read run or pass
- i. Rule on complete, incomplete and progress spots.
- j. When possible, the nearest official to the runner will judge progress when the flag is pulled, and the next nearest official will look for illegal contact.
- k. You have sideline responsibilities from endline to endline
- l. Responsible for the goal line and the end line.

4. Back Judge

- a. **Assist with spotting the ball on deeper plays and at the discretion of the Referee. Players do not spot the ball.**
- b. **Responsible for the play clock**
- c. **Confirm the next down with the Line Judge and Head Line-Judge**
- d. **Count the defense and confirm with the Line Judge**
- e. **Initial position is in the middle of the field, 8-10 yards behind the deepest defender or at the next line to gain.**
- f. **Observe the inside receivers initial release and then shift focus to deep routes (look up tackle language)**
- g. **Rule on complete, incomplete**
- h. **When possible, the nearest official to the runner will judge progress when the flag is pulled, and the next nearest official will look for illegal contact.**
- i. **Responsible for the goal line and the end line.**

GOAL LINE MECHANICS

1. Head Line-Judge and the Line Judge moves directly to the goal line if the ball is snapped on/inside the 5-yard line.
2. Line Judge is on the goal line, when the ball is snapped between the 6 and 10-yard line.
3. If play starts inside 15-yard line, the Back Judge is responsible for the end-line. Prior to play, communicate to Line Judge and Head Line-Judge that they have coverage of the goal line.
4. Back Judge will start in the middle of the field on the end line

SCRIMMAGE KICK MECHANICS

1. Referee
 - a. At the conclusion of a 3rd down play that ends short of the line to gain, the referee will turn to the offensive sideline and ask, "Punt or Play?" The flank official on that sideline will ask the same question. If the coach of the team on offense does not answer, the referee will ask one more time. If there is no response, the referee will mark the ball ready for play and the offense must play (not punt) within 25 seconds. If the offense then chooses not to play, they must call a timeout and then declare they wish to punt. Remember, after receiving the snap, the kicker has 5 seconds to punt the ball, or a delay of game penalty will be called, and the clock will start on the next snap. Finally, if the offense declares that they are punting, the referee will mark the ball ready for play (25-second play clock). Then the referee will observe the defense to see if they are substituting as a result of the offense's choice to kick the ball. If they are subbing, the referee will hold up the snap giving the defense adequate time to substitute. But the referee will not hold up the snap beyond the 20-second mark thus giving the offense time to snap the ball and provide the 5-seconds to kick the ball. All of this is necessary to prevent illegal consumption of time by the team ahead in the score.
 - b. Observe the snap, the stationary kicking team players, and the kick.
 - c. Rule on the kick crossing the line of scrimmage or not.
 - d. Use reverse mechanics during the return.
 - e. Signal to the Head Line-Judge to move the Down Box at the end of the play.
2. Head Line-Judge
 - a. Position yourself on your sideline even with the receiver.
 - b. Mark the spot that the kick ends, or the spot of the end of the return.
3. Line Judge
 - a. Position yourself on your sideline slightly deeper than the receiver.
 - b. Allow the returner one opportunity to possess the airborne or grounded kick.
 - c. Mark the spot that the kick ends, or the spot of the end of the return.
4. Back Judge
 - a. Position yourself in the middle of the field and 7 yards behind the returner.
 - b. Primary responsibility on the completion of the kick

PENALTY MECHANICS

1. The crew may use radios to expedite the communication of penalty information and the proper enforcement of the penalty.
2. Referee
 - a. Announce the penalty while the rest of the crew marches it off.
3. ~~The Referee~~ Back Judge
 - a. March off all penalties with the Head Line-Judge.
 - b. Wait for the Head Line-Judge and Line Judge to confirm the enforcement before spotting the ball.

4. Head Line-Judge
 - a. March off all penalties with the Back Judge
5. Line Judge
 - a. Wait for the Back Judge and Head Line-Judge to march off the penalty and then follow on your sideline. ~~unless another official helps and marches off the ball out of convenience.~~

AFTER THE GAME

The crew immediately leaves the field together and the Referee will lead a post-game discussion

