

Season Preparation Guide

Jeff Dixon
South Valley Flag Football League
September 1, 2008
Version 1.0

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Introduction

Welcome to the Play Flag Football League's NFL FLAG Program! We are pleased and excited to offer you a comprehensive, educational, fun and competitive flag football program. As a coach you are critical to success of that goal! Here is some information designed to prepare you to participate in our league.

Getting started

Forming a Team

First Steps

It will always start with your child or a child you wish to support. Forming a team begins when you decide to coach. The best way to form a team is to get kids who are friends and support each other to play together. Your child can be the starting point, but they should not be focal point. Players will rush to join a team they feel welcome to. Make sure everyone feels welcome. Again, don't try to build a dominate team, build dominate friendships using flag football as the vehicle.

While teams may form themselves out of groups of kids wanting to play together, more often than not, they will be created by PFF staff. These teams will need some fun, team building exercises to bond. Have kids arrive for practice early for non-foot ball games such as dodge ball. Alternate who each player warms up with so they get to know each other. Have them learn something about a different player each week and report back to the team. The quicker the team bonds, the easier your task will be.

Communication

Communication really starts before the team does. After you apply to coach you can send a list of the players you want on your team to info@playflagfootball.com. When the players register, they can list you in the "Coach/Buddy Request" field. We make every effort to fulfill all buddy/coach requests, but we cannot guarantee players will be on your team. It is best to make sure they all use the same name when requesting you. The name format should be your first name, last name.

After the registration deadline, PFF begins to assemble teams. Once your team is assembled, your will be sent a roster notice listing your players and their contact information. Rosters are balanced by age and grade. The season schedule is set around the same time and posted on the web site. Schedule balancing is done to insure that teams of similar skills play each other.

Keep communication ongoing throughout the season. PFF provides schedule, standings and other information to all parents each week via our web site. Follow up on that information with emails of your own. Establish everyone's schedule for the season. Find out who will be at the games and who may miss a game or two. Provide your contact information to the parents so they can reach you if something comes up. Regular information with help everyone coordinate the team activities with their own.

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Roster and Contact Information

Roster and contact information is league confidential and should be treated with care. We provide coaches this information to assist with practice and game day coordination. Please respect other families and only use it when necessary for team activities. Play Flag Football sends roster information to coaches each season once all roster assignments are made.

Getting to Know Your Players

Establishing Goals and Common Interests

In your first email to the team let them know something about you. Formulate then share your goals for the season with the parents as well as the kids. Build teamwork with your parents by having them introduce themselves and share a little information at the first meeting. Have kids and parents share their goals for the upcoming season. There already are the common interests among you of football and kids. Build on that by getting the parents involved in team activities. If they are part of the team, they can't stand on the outside and criticize.

Getting Parents involved

Despite what you believe, you will not do as well alone as you will with help. Don't be shy about asking for it. Every family should have a responsibility. Snacks, equipment, drinks are weekly tasks that can be split up. Set up a call tree or assign an administrator who will keep everyone connected. On the field, have three coaches – Yourself on offense or defense, another offensive or defensive coach and a coach to handle statistics and rotation. Other ideas include having parents to help with warm ups and/or drills during practice, making banners, planning an end of season party and having someone set up a team area for all the parents to sit together.

Complete a Skills Assessment of Your Players

Starting a season with kids you have known for years or ones you just met, it is in every coach's best interest to evaluate their team before and at the end of each season. A form is included at the back of the handbook that can be used to tracking player skills and development. Here are our recommended focus areas:

- 40 Yard Dash and Agility Course
- Pass and Receiving
- Fundamentals – flag pulling, hiking, handoffs, coverage, rush philosophies

Setting Expectations

Play Flag Football promotes its leagues with the promise of no weekday practices. Everyone is told that practices are ONLY on Sundays before the game. Every team is given a minimum of 45 minutes to practice just before their games. Just about every coach will think they need more than 45 minutes to get the team ready for games. We believe it can be done in the allotted time with the proper expectations and execution. Treat the practices like instruction and the games like practice and you will have plenty of time. Always keep in mind this a RECREATION LEAGUE. The winning is in the learning.

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Still we realize you as a coach may want more time. Before you call for practice during the week, consider starting earlier on Sundays. Start your practice 30-45 minutes before the scheduled practice time to get more work in. We can assist by changing the posted start time to one of your choosing. If you do call for a weekday practice, do not penalize the players who do not make it, remember, they didn't sign up for weekday practices.

Having Fun

Getting everyone involved

The first thing you should do is make it a point to learn every player's name and meet their parents or guardians. Get to know a little bit about the parents too. It will help when you start to work with the players if you have met their parents and know a little about them. Ask players about their favorite teams, previous football experiences and what they like about football. It makes them feel more comfortable with you and gives you a starting point in understanding the players' capabilities.

Next, it is a common approach when coaching to be the Lone Ranger. Many coaches make the mistake of trying to "Go it alone" either due to lack of familiarity with the team parents or being uncomfortable asking for help. We strongly encourage all coaches to get all their parents involved. This can be done in a variety of ways. Here are some suggestions:

- Share your game plans with the parents
- Get a parent to assist with practice, rotation, defense and/or offense
- Have families take turns bringing snacks for the players each week
- Have parents assist with organizing of an end of season event for the kids
- Start a call tree or assign a parent to follow up with families each week about game time

Working together will build an esprit de corps between the parents that will filter down to the kids and increase the enjoyment of their Play Flag Football experience.

Rules and Guidelines

The Game

NFL Flag is a 5-on-5 No-Contact game that relies mainly on passing with some running. There is no blocking allowed at any time. A coin toss is used to determine first possession and then the fun begins. Each team starts on their own 5-Yard line except in the case of an interception. They have three plays to reach the midfield line-to-gain and then three more to score. At halftime, teams switch ends of the field and start over. Coaches are required to make sure every child has equal playing time, but we will not dictate where they play. Our officials will be focused on ensuring safety and that games move along smoothly.

Each game runs approximately 45 minutes and consists of two 20-minute halves with a one-minute intermission. Each game will be preceded by a 45-minute session that includes warm up drills, agility drills, skills development and a limited team practice. The two game and practice session runs approximately 2 hours, 30 minutes. Players should be at the field at least 15 minutes

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in advance of their session start time, not game start time. These are the ONLY required sessions for each player. Teams may choose to hold additional team practices on their own time. Of course, players may miss time for family and school commitments without penalty.

Rule Highlights

The current South Valley Football Rule Set can be found at www.svflagfootball.net. Print it out and place at the back of your Coach's Binder. Some highlights to be aware of at all times:

- Know where the No-Run-Zones are and when you are in them
- Make sure all players have their jerseys tucked in at all times
- Laterals are not allowed at any time or anywhere
- Quarterback has to handoff the ball for someone to run from the line of scrimmage
- Advancement is determined by where the feet and flags are, not the ball

Common Penalties

Here are the most common penalties by age group. Provide extra focus preventing these fouls.

- 5-6 Age Bracket
 - False Start
 - Offsides – Offense or defense
 - Shielding or running with the carrier
 - Illegal run
 - Flag guarding
- 7-8 Age Bracket
 - False Start
 - Offsides – Offense or defense
 - Shielding or running with the ball carrier
 - Flag Guarding
 - Illegal run
 - Illegal pass
 - Pass interference
- 9-11 Age Bracket
 - Flag Guarding
 - Offsides – Offense
 - Illegal rush
 - Illegal pass
 - Pass Interference
 - Charging
- 12-14 Age Bracket
 - Flag Guarding
 - Illegal rush
 - Illegal pass
 - Pass Interference
 - Charging
 - Tainting or unsportsmanlike conduct

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Player Checklist

Paperwork

1. Signed NFL Waiver*
2. Signed New Millennia Athletic Club Waiver*
3. Birth Certificate – Parents must bring a COPY for SBFL to first day of play
4. Registration Form*
5. Confirmed fee payment*

(* Part of online registration process)

Required Equipment

1. Mouthpiece – Players will not be allowed to participate without one! **
2. Shorts or sweat pants WITHOUT pockets
3. Jersey**
4. Flags**

(** First set provided by Play Flag Football League)

Suggested Items

1. Athletic bag to hold equipment, extra clothing and other personal effects
2. Cleats – soccer or football is recommended – No steel cleats are allowed!
3. Sun-block, jacket, hat, extra socks
4. Drink and snack for each game day

It would be best if each player has every item on this list each game day. Kids can play in tennis shoes, but they will be sliding around on the grass. Shorts with pockets can catch fingers that get broken or dislocated. This is a no-contact league, but kids going for the ball can run into each other. Mouthpieces ensure they keep their brilliant smiles. Kids will get thirsty and hungry during their time with us. A snack and drink meets this need. Finally, an athletic bag to carry each child's equipment and personal effects will reduce the chances of things getting lost or a child not being able to play due to lack of a mouthpiece, jersey or other equipment.

In summary, we are interested in ensuring every child has a safe and fun football experience. Please support our efforts in this arena by making sure your child is on time, fully equipped and ready to play each week.

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Practice Week 1

The first week is mostly about communication. Teams that come together will know each, possibly be family friends. The rest of the teams have to get to know each other on an accelerated rate. Start your first practice with a round robin discussion where each player introduces themselves and shares information about them selves. This can be daunting task for a young player. Make it easier for them. Start by telling a little bit about your self, where you are from, what activities you like, general information about your family. Ask leading questions about their favorite team, sport, and players

Move from there into discussing what the team is going to do that day. Recommended first day activities are:

- Review of NFL FLAG game rules, highlights, exciting aspects such as scoring, playing different positions, etc.
- Skills Assessment – Follow skills outlined on form, identify strengths and weaknesses of each player
- Discuss football fundamentals, get a sense of your team’s experience
- Quick scrimmage playing touch football
- Review activities for next week

End practice on a positive note, give players a homework assignment for the week, it could be stretching and strengthening such as sit up s and push ups or it could be throwing the ball a little every day. Get other parents involved. Set schedule for bringing snacks, review the season schedule to find out who will be missing when.

Practice Week 2

This is our second week of practice. If you have not already done so, please complete the following activities first:

- Get to know the kids first names
- Introduce yourself to parents
- Review fundamentals of the game such as rules, huddles, cadence, hiking

Based on the skill level we have included some suggestions you can use to prepare them for their first games next week. Staff will be available to assist with any drills you need demonstrated or explained. Take the team through at least 30-45 minutes of drills then move onto learning at least two-four plays from the playbook. Move at your team’s speed. Make sure the kids get it right before moving on. Coaches who want game time can scrimmage against their on field neighbor. There are two teams assigned to each field.

Warm ups (10 minutes)

- Run one lap around football field
- Jumping Jacks – Four sets of 10
- Stretches – Legs, Arms, abdomen
- Legs - Hamstring stretch, calf stretch, butterfly stretch,

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- Arms – Stretch triceps, hands and shoulders
- Abdomen – Back arch, alternate hand to toe touch, side hand to toe touch

Basic Drills (10 minutes each)

Divide players into groups of four to five each. If you do not have enough for two groups of four, place everyone in the same group.

Hiking, handoffs, running and flag pulling

Activity:

From the line of scrimmage, place two cones seven yards away equidistant from the ball. Place defender between the cones. Have the center snap the ball to the QB who hands the ball to the running back. The Running Back attempts to run past the defender while remaining inside the two cones. The defender attempts to pull the running back's flags. Whistle dead after runner is past.

Objectives:

- Center – Demonstrate good snap skill
- QB – Demonstrate cadence, ball handling and handoff skills
- Running Back (RB) – Demonstrate handoff, ball handling and running skills
- Defender – Demonstrate pursuit and flag pulling skills

Rotation:

- Four players - RB to Defender, Defender to Center, Center to QB, QB to RB
- Five or more Players - RB to Defender, Defender to Center, Center to QB, QB to back of the line, first in line to RB

Hiking, passing, receiving and defending

Activity:

From the line of scrimmage, set the ball in the center of field. Have receivers lined up on the left then right of the QB. Place defender 5-7 yards away from the receiver. Have the center snap the ball to the QB who then passes to the receiver. The receiver runs the route called out by the QB. The defender attempts to block or intercept the pass then pursue to pull flags. Whistle dead after runner is past.

Objectives:

- Center – Demonstrate good snap skill
- QB – Demonstrate cadence, ball handling and passing skills – stance, spiral, accuracy
- Receiver – Demonstrate route knowledge, ball catching and running skills
- Defender – Demonstrate positioning, defending, pursuit and flag pulling skills

Rotation:

- Four players - RB to Defender, Defender to Center, Center to QB, QB to RB
- Five or more Players - RB to Defender

Special Focus Areas: (15 minutes)

Those drills will help all players with the basics. Here are suggested "Focus" areas to make sure they are ready for next week.

Instructional levels

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- Review field dimensions, basic rules and position awareness
 - Take team around the field. Ask players to identify goal, midfield, sidelines and demonstrate understanding of what they mean
 - Demonstrate meaning of No-Run Zones
 - Discuss run versus pass, rushing the QB, not running with ball carrier
- Demonstrate Hiking, Huddles, Cadence knowledge
 - Hiking – T-Snap versus Shotgun
 - Huddles – Circle or Line up, 30 second rule, listen and don't talk
 - Cadence – Everyone lines up quickly, QB checks position, Ready-Set-Hut

Beginning levels

- Review Hiking, Huddles, and Cadence (See above)
- Demonstrate handoff, passing and receiving skills
 - Handoffs - RB arm placement, solid exchange, QB DELIVERS/RB TAKES the ball
 - Passing – Holding the ball, stance, leading the receiver
 - Receiver – Catching the pass, putting the ball away to run

Interim levels

- Review passing and handoff skills (See above)
- Demonstrate passing routes, defensive coverage
 - Passing routes - Page 30-32 of playbook
 - Defensive coverage – Man versus zone
 - Zone – Diamond, Flats with Cornerbacks or Safeties

Advanced levels

Review the following principles with players. Create game-like situations to develop skills

- Game Management
 - Time Awareness – How much time is left in the half?
 - Down and Distance – What down is it? How far do you have to go?
 - Know the Score! – Official will call out score after change of possession.
 - Good sportsmanship – Give the flag back to the runner!
 - Respect the Official
- Situational Response
 - 1st and short – Take a shot downfield
 - 3rd and long – Don't make mistakes
 - Last 2 minutes – No huddle, rotate players quickly
 - PAT decisions
 - 1 Point is pass only from 5 yards
 - 2-Point is Run or Pass from 12 yards

Running Plays: (30-45 minutes)

After you have made sure your players know what to do and how to do it, run plays with them. All plays referenced below are in our playbook. Check the page numbers shown to get visual presentation.

Start your practice advancing by the ball out from your end zone or going towards the defenders. Start on the nearest No-Run Zone from either your end zone or midfield. Practice each direction according to your need. Players should learn to play until the whistle blows.

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Keep them safe. Be sure to point out actions that will result in a penalty. Make the learning fun and keep it a game. There is no need to deride players for making mistakes. Help them learn how to prevent them by increasing their awareness.

Make sure everyone rotates through the positions. Switch out at every series or two. You will need this to be prepared for games, every player on the field should be aware of where their teammates are.

Offense

Play sequence (By page number)

- First Series – BASIC: Designed to get your team a first down. Run Pg. 3, 4, 5
- Second Series – PRECISION: running routes correctly is the key: Run Pg. 10, 12, 16
- Third Series – RAZZLE DAZZLE: Mix it up and make it fun. Run Pg. 7, 8, 21
- Final Series – DESPERATATION: Good way to tire them out! Run Pg. 15, 20, 24

Defense

The biggest areas your defense should practice on is rushing and pulling flags. Younger ages also should be taught to “Stay Home” and not over pursue the ball carrier. Make sure the rusher knows to following the ball or cover the QB. Defenders should follow through every play to pull the flags until the whistle blows.

Finish the practice with positive comments for every player. Review what took place, ask questions and provide answers. It sounds simplex, but the kids need the encouragement and leadership you provide. Make it positive.

Remember - “It’s all about the Kids” so lets give them an experience to be remembered.