



Morgan Hill Youth Sports Alliance, Inc.
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Game Management Guide

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SOUTH VALLEY FLAG FOOTBALL



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Introduction

Game Days are not like regular practice days. Things move very fast and you need to be prepared. Here are basic steps for a successful game day including practices, player rotation, working with officials, game management and after the game suggestions.

Running a Practice

Setting Objectives

Each practice should have objectives and specific areas of focus. It should also be run professionally. Professionalism starts with a timely arrival. Coaches should be there first and leave last each week. Make sure you have all the team equipment. Set up a standard meeting place for your players. Get the team organized prior to beginning practice. Have players take turns leading warm ups. These players could be your Team Captains for the day or the first game. Communicate the objectives for the day to all players and parents. Describe the drills that the players will be doing, their purpose, how they should be done then track the results. You will like what you see.

Pre-Practice Warm Up

Each player should warm up 10-15 minutes before each game to prevent injury. Here are some helpful suggestions for warming up your team:

- One lap around the field
- Jumping jacks, push ups and sit ups
- Stretching (legs, thighs, arms, crossovers, push- ups, high knees, reaction,)

Conducting Drills

- Each week you will generally have 20-25 minutes to run drills. There are several drills that can be used to develop skills quickly. These drills can then be expanded into plays. First, you need to make sure that everyone is on the same page. Make sure all your players understand the purpose and the objective of the drill. Go over terminology to make sure they know what is expected of them. Demonstrate every skill as you go over it. Next, make sure everyone participates at every position. Don't lock players into a specific role. Pick drills that helps players learn new skills. Run combination drills to help you save time preparing for the game. Finally, pick a play or two to add to your arsenal each week. Don't overdo it.
- Here are some examples of offensive/defensive combinations drills:
 - Four Man Run Drills – Set four players as defender, center, QB and running back. With the defender 7 yards off, set two cones five yards on the defensive side of the ball. The center snaps the ball to the QB who hands off to the running back who runs towards the defender while staying between the cones. The defender approaches at the snap of the ball and attempts to pull the running back's flags. After the drill, the running back becomes the defender, the defender becomes the center, the center becomes the QB and the QB becomes the running back. Continue this rotation until the original defender is back in place.



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- Three Man Pass Drills – Set three players as QB, Receiver, Defender. Set a line of scrimmage with the coach snapping the ball to the QB with a receiver on the left or right side. Place a defender opposite to shadow, then cover the receiver. Run three patterns on each side then rotate positions with QB going to defender, defender to receiver and receiver to QB. Continue rotation until original QB is back in position.

Running a Game

Expectations

The rubber meets the road at game time. Things get tough even in a recreation league because of the numerous expectations you have to meet. Yours will be best served if you are focused on making sure everyone has equal playing time. Even still, parents will be watch VERY closely to make sure that their child is having a good time. This generally equates to playing time, but can also be more specific in terms of getting the ball, how much PT other players (including yours) get and/or positions played. That is why it is so important to have other parents involved during practices and games. They are part of the process that way instead for sitting on the outside. Together with good communication, it goes a long way to managing everyone's expectations.

Game Plan

- After you complete drills you should prepare the team for the game. Share your game plan with the players and parents. Focus on rotation, starting position and your expectations for the team. Your game plan should include plays that develop that week's skill and can be put in for any player type. Other considerations should be what you will do in No Run Situations, Point-After Attempts and when you will use your time outs. It doesn't need to be complex, but having your plans made before the game will help when situations arise.

Game Preparation

- Get your team warmed up and complete their practice
- Brief the players and parents on your game plan
- Keep it simple
- Identify your captains
- Review game responsibilities with your other coaches, confirm rotation
- Have team waiting in end zone of the assigned field before the last five minutes of the previous game.
- Have everyone's equipment check before going on the field
- Give everyone a starting position
- Verify Official's policy on trick plays, coaches on the field, etc.

Coin Toss

Coin Toss is less critical than it is in tackle games. Remember winner automatically gets possession and the loser gets to choose direction. Teams swap possession and direction in the second half.



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You should designate a speaking captain as part of your game preparation. Relay your decisions to each Captain so that they will make sure to choose correctly.

Running Plays

Call the play quickly. You have only 30 seconds in the huddle. We understand that you may need to go on the field for the younger ages and at the beginning of the season, but by the 3rd week you should be able to call the play from the sidelines for the older ages. The play clock moves fast. Have your play ready before the previous one ends. The speed of the huddle will dictate the number of plays the kids get per game. After you call the play, let the kids run it. They don't need someone yelling in their ear. If you have done a good job of coaching, they will figure it out. After the play, provide feedback. It is important to stay positive. Ask and counsel, don't yell and berate. Praise in public, criticize in private. Remember, the officials will be monitoring behavior.

Profanity is not allowed at any time. That will get you removed from the game or worse.

Rotation

This is probably the most important part of the game and the one easiest to forget about in the heat of the moment. Make sure you have someone assigned to coordinate this activity during the game. You can use your own method and we have several methods to suggest depending on the experience and age of your team

- **Progression**

Progression is best used in the younger age groups where players may want to play different positions and the kids are all learning new skills. It works the same way that a volleyball team rotates during a game. Players start at the Receiver position at the far side of the field and moves RECEIVER to CENTER to QUARTERBACK to RUNNING BACK to RECEIVER on the near side of the field to SIDELINE. You can change the flow depending on your formation. The key is that every player gets equal playing time at each position. This is very important for the development of younger players.

- **Squads**

Teams of ten make it easy to rotate squads in a 5-on-5 game. You can establish squads of equivalent skill or on an A/B basis. Within each offensive squad you can designate Center, Quarterback, Receivers and Running Backs or rotate through the positions. Within each defensive squad you can designate Rushers, Defensive Backs and Linebackers or rotate through the positions. You have one squad star the game on offense and the other on defense. At halftime you switch squads from Offense to Defense this ensuring everyone plays on both sides of the ball.

- **Substitution**

Substitution is most common rotation used by teams. Coaches should be cautious when using substitution to rotate players for several reasons. In the midst of a game you might lose track and players may not get equal playing time. It is also possible to get caught up



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the competition of the moment and not ensure equal playing time. This method works however with older kids as you can use it to keep kids heads in the game by using them to relay plays into the QB, setting up trick plays with specific kids, etc.

Playing Time

The purpose of focusing on rotation is to ensure equitable playing time. For the younger kids this is most important as they haven't fully embraced the team concept yet. Playing time is equally important with the older players however they may want to stick to their areas of expertise as opposed to playing every position.

As a coach, playing time is a topic you should be sure address with parents and players before the start of the season. Defining your philosophy, setting their expectations and following through on your declaration will go a long way towards avoiding disappointment and hurt feelings about a perceived lack of equal playing time.

Team Management

- Playing time vs. winning – No matter how much you remind yourself that this is a recreational league, you will find yourself occasionally “Going-For-The-Win.” When that happens, remember that playing and learning is winning. No team gets anymore recognition than another when the season ends. Still if you have been diligent about playing time through out the games, you might be able to get away with one. Just don't overdo it.
- Interacting with the other team – This is where your leadership is paramount. Players look to you for guidance. Our expectation is that EVERY coach, player and parent will be respectful to the other team. Coaches can congratulate the other team's players and coaches on good plays, players should always hand the flag back to their opponent, congratulate each other on good plays and NEVER trash talk. When that starts the officials will be stepping in and the flags will start flying.
- Huddles – The clock never stops unless a timeout is called and you only get one per half. Quick turnarounds in the huddle are the key to lots of action. The rule book gives you 30 seconds for the huddle, but only the younger ages should need that much time and that is just at the beginning of the season. Have your play ready before the previous play ends. Send the play in by signal or another player. If you must go on the field, be waiting for your kids with the play ready. Call the play then get off the field. For their part, players should ALWAYS run back to the huddle for their next play. Players on the sidelines should stay next to the coach so that they can get in the game quickly. Remember, the 30 second play clock will start the moment the ball is placed.
- Way ahead or way behind - Games once they are lost or won early are a great time to mix up your rotation or go back to a skill or drill that your players are struggling with. Losing, it is a good time to make lemonade! Show your players how to maintain through a loss. Nobody wins by more that 28 points in any PFF game and when the point spread is that high we go into scrimmage mode with the losing team getting the ball three straight times before the winning team is even considered.



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- Situational response
 - 1st and long or short – If you are 1st and long, you need positive yards to get or keep momentum going. A high probability play for 5-10 yards is a good choice here – Curls, outs, etc. On the other hand if you are first and short near midfield, GO DEEP! Run a trick play or take a shot downfield. Just make sure your QB knows not to throw an interception. As long as nobody makes a mistake, you have a play to burn.
 - 2nd long or short – 2nd and long means you missed your first play or didn't get much. Get at least half of what you need here. Don't go for it all unless you know it will work. In short yardage situations, gauge the need for the first down over the chance for another quick strike. Don't outguess yourself about the first down though. The best choice here is get the first,
 - 3rd long or short – Gotta get there! Use whatever trickery you have to get the first. Remember that turnover on downs is better than turnover by mistake. Try to live to play another day. Don't give up the big play.
 - Defense – You may have noticed that all the plays above speak to the offense. Simply put, to succeed at defense in these situations, all you have to do is stop the offense from succeeding on the advice given above. Plan accordingly. Mix up coverages, disguise the rush and take away the run then pull flags.
 - No Run Zones - No Run Zones are the last five yards before the Line-To-Gain. They are what they appear to be. Teams MUST pass when in these areas. Running is not allowed for any reason, however teams can still handoff to beat the seven second clock. No Run Zones are marked by a hash line as opposed to the solid line at midfield, sidelines, and around the end zone.
 - Last two minutes – With a running clock the last two minutes of a half or game goes VERY fast. Make sure you know the time remaining as it is counted down. Rotate out players that run long passes. Have several plays ready to run they can run NO HUDDLE. Call plays in from the sidelines. KNOW THE SCORE!

Sideline Control

It is the coach's responsibility to control the team and families at a game. South Valley Flag has several guidelines that assist with this task. First, only players and coaches are allowed on the sidelines during a game. Despite the opinion of some coaches, no team needs more than three coaches to assist with game operations. Second, for safety reasons no chairs, signs, coolers or strollers are allowed on the sidelines. Finally, players and coaches are required to act in a sportsmanlike and respectful manner towards officials, league staff and opposing players.

Working with the Officials

South Valley Flag officials are there to support and assist coaches with their players during the game. Together with league staff and team coaches, they endeavor to make the game experience as rewarding as possible for each and every child and their family. Officials are trained and tested before each season and as the season progresses. They are human though and may not see everything the way you do and can make a mistake. The important thing is that we get it right for the kids.



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That being said, many coaches strive to show their skill by how good they work the officials during a game. That is counter productive to South Valley Flag objectives. Players and parents will take their lead from the coach. Simply put, bad behavior is not tolerated in the South Valley Flag League. It is the coach's responsibility to make sure their team players and parents behave during a game. Approach officials in a respectful manner to clarify calls and understand perspective. Don't expect to agree all the time. If Officials are not performing their job properly, please notify the Field Director or contact the League office that day. We guarantee to that we will respond to game complaints quickly and decisively.

After the Game

This is your best chance to teach. Review the game with the kids in a calm, supportive manner. Ask and counsel players through the mistakes they made. Talk about the things that worked too. Have something positive to say to each player about their performance. Take care of housekeeping. Make sure your sideline is cleaned up after game, take all trash to recycling and trash bins. Make sure everyone picks up their gear, shoes and clothing. Return any "Found" items to the Director's Tent on your way out. Keeping the sideline clear for the next team to come through will ensure that everyone has a clean sideline to start their game.

Team Cheer

It is an important part of game closure to finish every game with a positive sportsmanship activity. Delivering a cheer for the other team regardless of the outcome of the game then shaking hands develops good sportsmanship in our young players. Be sure to develop one or two, use them every game and MEAN IT!

Recognition

Recognition happens no matter whether it is planned or not. It is up to the coach to make sure it is a positive experience for their player. During games, be sure to compliment ALL players on things they do well. Since the season is a learning experience for the kids, find constructive ways to instruct kids in what they are doing wrong. Above all, don't take out your frustrations on the players. We are the adults and should set a positive example for our players.

If you plan to conduct an end of season recognition event, start planning it early in the season. Assign a parent or two to the task and let them run with it. When recognizing players at the end of the season, be sure to recognize EVERY player for some achievement or skill.

Finally, recognition goes beyond your own team. Congratulate players from other teams for good play even if it is bad for your team. You will see our officials and staff do the same thing. This is a recreational league that is focused on providing a positive experience for players. Your support in this priority is appreciated.