Under The Lights Flag Football: Winter 2026 Rules

Wilmington, NC. Saturday afternoons at Cape Fear Academy, Dec 12 – Jan 30.

1. Divisions

- **Coed:** PreK–K, 1st–2nd, 3rd–4th, 5th–6th, 7th–8th. PreK–K plays by the UTL coed rules below.
- **All girls:** 1st–2nd, 3rd–5th, 6th–8th, High School. Girls divisions start at 1st grade. Younger girls play PreK–K coed. High School girls follow the 6th–8th girls rules.

2. Field

- 60 yards long, including two 10-yard end zones (40 yards goal line to goal line). 25–30 yards wide.

3. Players and equipment

- Every division plays **5 on 5**.
- A team may play with 4 or more players. A game not started **10 minutes** after its scheduled time because of missing players is a forfeit.
- Popper flags. Both flags must be attached and visible. Jerseys must be tucked in and can't cover the flags. No flag guarding, holding, tying or altering the flags.
- Required: mouthguard and cleats (no metal spikes). The league provides flags and game balls.
- **Ball size:** Pee-Wee for PreK–4th coed and 1st–5th girls. Junior for 5th–6th coed and 6th–8th and HS girls. Youth for 7th–8th coed.

4. Game length and clock

- Two 20-minute running-clock halves, with a 1-minute halftime (2 minutes for 1st–2nd girls).
- The clock stops only for timeouts and injuries, except in the last minute.
- **Last minute:** the clock stops once the time reaches 1:00, or when the previous play ends under 1:00. After that it stops on:
- incompletions
- out of bounds
- sacks and kneel downs
- spikes
- change of possession
- penalties
- a bad snap
- **Play clock:** 30 seconds, or 45 seconds for PreK–2nd. The play starts on the official's whistle, including after a timeout.
- **Timeouts:** two 30-second timeouts per half. If a timeout is called after a touchdown, the clock doesn't start until the play after the conversion.
- Teams switch sides at halftime. A coin flip decides possession or direction, and the winner may defer.
- A half can't end on a defensive penalty. The offense gets one untimed down.

5. Downs and possession

- Every possession starts at the offense's 5-yard line. That includes after scores, turnovers on downs and halftime. There are no throw-offs or kickoffs.
- The offense has 3 downs to reach midfield, then 4 downs to score.
- All snaps are from the center of the field. The center must snap directly to the player behind them, with no trick snaps. In PreK–2nd, the center may snap side-saddle.
- **Formation:** 2 players on the line of scrimmage, including the center. Only 1 player may be in motion. The center can't take a handoff from the QB.

6. Scoring

- Touchdown: 6.
- Extra point: 1 from the 5, or 2 from the 10.
- Safety: 2. The team that scores it also gets the ball at its own 5. A safety happens when a fumble lands in the end zone or a flag is pulled in the end zone. A bad snap into the end zone is **not** a safety: the ball goes back to the line of scrimmage and the down is lost.
- An interception on an extra point is dead, and the try is no good.
- Other interceptions can be returned for a TD. If the returner's flag is pulled in their own end zone, the ball goes to the 5.

7. Rushing the QB (all divisions)

- Rushers must line up **7 yards off the line of scrimmage**. Any number of players lined up 7+ yards back may rush. The rusher has the right of way, and the offense must try to avoid them.
- **Deception rule:** any handoff, fake handoff, lateral or backward pass behind the line lets **all** defenders cross the line.
- Contact with the passer during the throwing motion is pass interference. The offense can take the result of the play, or 10 yards and a replay of the down.
- Impeding the rusher: 5 yards from the line of scrimmage, and the down is replayed.
- Everyone else on defense starts 2 yards off the line, or on the goal line when the ball is at the +1.
- **Sack count:** 7 seconds for all divisions, coed and girls. The count starts at the snap and does not reset on a lateral or backward pass.
- **Blitzes:** each defense gets **2 blitzes per half**, and unused blitzes don't carry over. Each team gets **1 blitz for all of overtime**. On a blitz, defenders lined up inside 7 yards may cross the line at the snap. Rushers lined up 7+ yards back can always rush and don't use a blitz. If the defense is offside on a blitz and the offense keeps the result of the play, the defense loses that blitz. If the down is replayed, it keeps it. Blitzing after all blitzes are used is unsportsmanlike conduct (15 yds).

8. Running

No division has a limit on the number of runs.

- **QB runs (all divisions):** the player who takes the snap can't run across the line unless a defender rushes. Once rushed, the QB may run. Otherwise, the QB must hand off or lateral before anyone runs.
- **PreK–K and 1st–2nd (coed and girls):** unlimited runs anywhere, including on extra points (1- and 2-point tries).

- **3rd grade and older (all coed and girls divisions, including HS):**
- No runs inside the 5-yard line.
- Runs are allowed on 2-point tries (from the 10) but not on 1-point tries (from the 5).
- A play counts as a run when the ball carrier crosses the line. It also counts as a run when a player takes a handoff and doesn't cross the line within the allotted time. A handoff followed by a forward pass is a pass play.

9. Passing

- All players are eligible receivers.
- **Any forward pass must be received in front of the line of scrimmage.** Breaking this rule is 5 yards and loss of down, and the defense may decline.
- Passes can be underhand or overhand.
- Any division may throw a backward pass for a double pass. The defense may then cross the line.
- A catch needs one foot inbounds. A receiver who goes out of bounds on their own can't be the first to touch a pass. That's 5 yards and loss of down.
- There is no intentional grounding.

10. Flag pulling and dead balls

- The ball is placed where the flag was pulled, not where the ball was.
- **No fumbles.** A fumbled or stripped ball is dead at that spot, and the offense keeps it. A lateral that hits the ground is spotted where it lands.
- The play is dead when the runner:
- has a flag pulled
- touches a knee down
- steps out of bounds
- dives, jumps or leaps (the ball is spotted where the runner left their feet)
- If the runner has lost a flag, a one-hand touch makes them down.
- Spinning is allowed. Flag guarding is not.
- No tackling or blocking. A stationary pick is allowed.

11. Penalties

Offense:

Foul	Penalty
Offensive pass interference	10 yds, replay the down
Illegal motion, illegal formation, false start	5 yds, replay the down
Illegal run, illegal forward pass	5 yds and loss of down
Blocking, leaping	Spot of the foul and loss of down
Flag guarding (including stiff arms)	5 yds from the spot and loss of down
Delay of game	5 yds
Unsportsmanlike conduct	15 yds, possible ejection

Defense:

Foul	Penalty
Pass interference	10 yds and replay the down, or the offense takes the play
Illegal contact	5 yds
Holding while pulling a flag	5 yds added to the end of the play
Early flag pull	5 yds
Offsides	5 yds
Illegal rush	5 yds
Inadvertent tackle	5 yds added on
Tackle from behind with a clear path to the end zone	Automatic touchdown
Unsportsmanlike conduct	15 yds and automatic first down (possible ejection)

A first down can come from penalty yardage. Inside either team's own 10, a penalty is half the distance to the goal.

12. Mercy rule

- A team up 30 or more gets 2 downs to reach midfield and 2 downs to score.
- The trailing team may start at the +10 with 4 downs.
- When the leading team intercepts, the ball is downed at the spot.
- The clock keeps running in the last minute.
- Normal rules return once the lead drops below 30.

13. Overtime (playoffs only)

- There is no overtime in the regular season.
- A coin flip picks first or second possession. Each team gets the ball at the 10, going the same direction, with 2 downs to score. After a TD, teams can go for 1 or 2.
- An interception changes possession at the 10 unless it's returned for a TD. If the intercepting team was already ahead, or scores on the return, the game can end there.
- If it's still tied after both possessions, the next round moves to the 5 and repeats until there's a winner. Teams alternate who goes first.

14. Coaches on the field

- PreK–4th coed: 1 coach on the field. 5th–8th coed: none.
- 1st–2nd and 3rd–5th girls: 2 coaches. 6th–8th and HS girls: 1 coach.

15. Weather (regular season and tournaments)

- After lightning, play waits one 30-minute period. If play can resume, the game picks up where it stopped.
- If play can't resume, a game past halftime is final as it stands. A game stopped before halftime is a 0-0 tie.
- After the delay, the schedule picks up with the next scheduled games.

- At tournaments: no drones, no filming from the coaches' sideline, and no tents on the sideline.

Based on the posted UTL Youth Flag Rules (uaflag.com) and Mike Young's Winter 2026 decisions. Oct 27, 2026.