



**NEW & UPDATED  
FOR FALL 2023**

## **SOUTHWEST LEHIGH NFL FLAG RULEBOOK**



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# SW LEHIGH RULES

## I. Game

1. At the start of each game, captains from both teams meet at midfield for the coin toss to determine who starts with the ball. The visiting team calls the toss.
2. The winner of the coin toss has the choice of offense or defense. The loser of the coin toss has the choice of direction. Possession changes to start the second half to the team that started the game on defense.
3. The offensive team takes possession of the ball at its 5-yard line and has three (3) plays to cross midfield. Once a team crosses midfield, it has three (3) plays to score a touchdown. **U6 has four (4) plays to cross midfield and then four (4) to score.**
4. **On the offense's side of the field, an offensive team may choose to go for an optional fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) down in an attempt to gain mid-field. Should the down be successful, the offense will have a new set of three (3) downs only. Should the 4<sup>th</sup> down be unsuccessful, the opposing team gains possession where the ball was last downed. If a team chooses to "punt" on fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) down, the ball goes to the 5-yard line**  
**NOTE: (1) An offense has 5-seconds to decide if it wishes to use the option. (2) NO optional 4<sup>th</sup> down is available after the first down marker.**
5. If the offense fails to score, the ball changes possession and the new offensive team starts its drive on its own 5-yard line.
6. If the offensive team fails to cross midfield, possession of the ball changes and the opposition starts its drive from its own 5-yard line.
7. All possession changes, except interceptions, start on the offense's 5-yard line.
8. Teams change sides after the first half. Possession changes to the team that started the game on defense.



## II. Terminology

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>Boundary Lines</b>          | The outer perimeter lines around the field. They include the sidelines and back of the end zone lines.   |
| <b>Line of Scrimmage</b>       | (LOS) an imaginary line running through the point of the football and across the width of the field.   |
| <b>Line-to-Gain</b>            | The line the offense must pass to get a first down or score.   |
| <b>Rush Line</b>               | An imaginary line running across the width of the field seven yards (into the defensive side) from the line of scrimmage.  |
| <b>Offense</b>                 | The team with possession of the ball.  |
| <b>Defense</b>                 | The team opposing the offense to prevent it from advancing the ball.   |
| <b>Passer</b>                  | The offensive player that throws the ball and may or may not be the quarterback.   |
| <b>Rusher</b>                  | The defensive player assigned to rush the quarterback to prevent him/ her from passing the ball by pulling his/her flags or by blocking the pass.  |
| <b>Downs (1-2-3)</b>           | The offensive team has three attempts or “downs” to advance the ball. It must cross the line to gain to get another set of downs or to score.  |
| <b>Live Ball</b>               | Refers to the period of time that the play is in action. Generally used in regard to penalties. Live ball penalties are considered part of the play and must be enforced before the down is considered complete. |
| <b>Dead Ball</b>               | Refers to the period of time immediately before or after a play.   |
| <b>Whistle</b>                 | Sound made by an official using a whistle that signifies the end of the play or a stop in the action for a timeout, halftime or the end of the game.   |
| <b>Inadvertent Whistle</b>     | Official's whistle that is performed in error.   |
| <b>Charging</b>                | An illegal movement of the ball-carrier directly at a defensive player who has established position on the field. This includes lowering the head or initiating contact with a shoulder, forearm or the chest.   |
| <b>Flag Guarding</b>           | An illegal act by the ball-carrier to prevent a defender from pulling the ball-carrier's flags by stiff arm, lowering elbow or head or by blocking access to the runner's flags with a hand or arm.              |
| <b>Shovel Pass</b>             | A legal pitch attempted beyond the line of scrimmage.  |
| <b>Lateral</b>                 | A backward or sideways toss of the ball by the ball-carrier.   |
| <b>Unsportsmanlike Conduct</b> | A rude, confrontational or offensive behavior or language.   |

### III. Eligibility

1. All players' legal guardians must agree to the online waiver form for their specific league before participating.

### IV. Equipment

1. The league provides each player with an official flag belt and NFL FLAG team jersey. Teams will use footballs provided by their league. **U6, U8, and U10 will use a pee-wee football. U12 and U14 will use a junior football. U17 will use a high-school football.**
2. Players must wear shoes. Cleats may not be allowed at certain locations. This will be specified in the tournament details you receive prior to the tournament. However, cleats with exposed metal are never allowed and must be removed.
3. Players may wear gloves, elbow pads and knee pads (without plastic caps). Braces or casts made of plastic, metal, plaster, or other hard materials **are not allowed unless fully wrapped (360 degrees) with LEAGUE APPROVED padded wraps or sleeves.**
4. Players must remove all jewelry, watches, wristbands, hats and do-rags. Winter beanies are allowed. **Hoodies must be tucked into the jersey or up.**
5. Players' jerseys must be tucked into shorts or pants if they hang below the belt line.
6. **Mouthguards are mandatory.**
7. Shorts or pants with belt loops or pockets must be taped. Games will not be delayed for a player to tape up pockets.
  - a. Flag belts cannot be the same color as shorts or pants.



## V. Field

1. The field dimensions are 30 yards by 70 yards with two 10-yard end zones, and a midfield line-to-gain. No-run zones precede each line-to-gain by 5 yards. However, some tournaments may use smaller fields because of field space available or to complete tournament scheduling on time.
2. No-run zones are in place to prevent teams from conducting power run plays. While in the no-run zones (a 5-yard imaginary zone before midfield and before the end zone), teams cannot run the ball in any fashion. All plays must be pass plays, even with a handoff.
3. Stepping on the boundary line is considered out of bounds.
4. Each offensive team approaches only TWO no-run zones in each drive (one zone 5 yards from midfield to gain the first down, and one zone 5 yards from the goal line to score a TD).



## VI. Rosters

1. Home teams wear dark colored jerseys. Visiting teams wear light color jerseys.
2. Teams must consist of at least five players **with a maximum of 12 players.**
3. Teams must start games with a minimum of FOUR players. The opposing team does need to match a team with four players and can choose to play with five.



## VII. Timing and Overtime

1. Games are played on a 40 minute continuous clock with two 20-minute halves. **THE CLOCK STOPS ONLY FOR TIMEOUTS OR INJURIES.**
2. **Halftime is two minutes.**
3. Each time the ball is spotted, a team has 30 seconds to snap the ball. Teams will receive one warning before a delay-of-game penalty is enforced.
4. **Each team has THREE (3) time-outs per game (NOT per half). These time-outs are 30-second time-outs only. The officials will start the play clock after the 30 seconds are up. Failure to get the play off in time will result in a delay of game and loss of down.**
5. **Any team up by two or more scores CANNOT call a timeout with under two minutes to go in the game. Doing so constitutes an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty.**
6. Officials can stop the clock at their discretion.
7. In the event of an injury, the clock will stop then restart when the injured player is removed from the field of play.
8. If the score is tied at the end of forty (40) minutes, an overtime period will be used to determine a winner. **Overtime format** is as follows:
  - a. **The team that started the second half on defense will start with the ball in overtime.**
    - i. **The referee will determine on which end of the field overtime will take place.**
  - b. **Each team will take turns getting one (1) play from the 10-yard line for two (2) points until only one team is successful.**
    - i. **Example: Team A starts on offense and is successful. Team B is then on offense and has an opportunity to match the score.**
    - ii. **If both teams are unsuccessful (or both teams are successful) rounds will continue until only one team has scored.**
  - c. **After five (5) rounds, both teams will try from the five (5) yard line with only the ability to pass the ball. (Except at the U6 level.)**
  - d. **Should a team intercept the ball and run it back to the opposite endzone, the intercepting teams wins the game.**
  - e. **Offensive penalties in overtime will result in the end of the try. Defensive penalties will be enforced half the distance to the goal (just outside the no-run zone on 2-pt tries.)**
  - f. **There are no timeouts.**
  - g. **The winning team will have two points (2) added to their score. Example: If the game was tied 14-14 after regulation, the final score would be 16-14.**

## VIII. Scoring

1. **Touchdown:** 6 points
2. **PAT** (point after touchdown) **1 point** (5-yard line) or **2 points** (10-yard line)
  - a. Note: 1 point PAT is pass only; 2 point PAT can be run or pass **(except at U6 level)**.
  - b. A team that scores a touchdown must declare whether it wishes to attempt a 1-point conversion (from the 5-yard line) or a 2-point conversion (from the 10-yard line). Any change, once a decision is made to try for the extra point, requires a charged timeout.
  - c. **There ARE extra points on defensive touchdowns.**
  - d. **Interceptions returned for scores on extra points ALWAYS count as 2-points even if the offense was attempting a 1-point conversion**
3. **Safety:** 2 points
  - a. A safety occurs when the ball-carrier is declared down in his/her own end zone. Runners can be called down when their flags are pulled by a defensive player, a flag falls out, they step out of bounds, their knee or arm touches the ground, a fumble occurs in the end zone or if a snapped ball lands in or beyond the end zone.
  - b. **A safety also occurs if an offensive penalty occurs in the endzone, such as an illegal forward pass, not throwing the ball over the line of scrimmage, running into the blitzer, etc. A 7-second violation in the endzone is NOT a safety.**
4. Forfeits are scored 28-0 for the winning team.

## IX. Coaches

1. Coaches are expected to adhere to NFL FLAG philosophies, coaching guidelines and code of conduct.
2. Coaches are allowed on the field to direct players according to need and division.
  - I. **U6 – Two (2) coaches**
  - II. **U8 – One (1) coach**
  - III. **U10 – One (1) coach allowed on offense. No (0) coaches allowed on defense**
  - IV. **U12 and up, no coaches allowed on the field while a play is running**



**Note: A team may have a total of three (3) coaches on their sideline. This number includes coaches on the field as well.**

## X. Live Ball/Dead Ball

1. The ball is live at the snap of the ball and remains live until the official whistles the ball dead.
2. The official will indicate the neutral zone and line of scrimmage.
  - a. It is an automatic dead ball foul if any player on defense or offense enters the neutral zone. In regard to the neutral zone, the official may give both teams a “courtesy” neutral zone notification to allow their players to move back behind the line of scrimmage.
3. A player who gains possession in the air is considered in bounds as long as the FIRST FOOT that comes down lands in the field of play.
4. The defense may not mimic the offensive team signals by trying to confuse the offensive players, while the quarterback is calling out signals to start the play. This will result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty.
5. Substitutions may be made on any dead ball.
6. Any official can whistle the play dead.
7. Play is ruled “dead” when:
  - a. The ball hits the ground.
    - i. If the ball hits the ground as a result of a bad snap, the ball is then placed where the ball hit the ground.
  - b. The ball-carrier’s flag is pulled.
  - c. The ball-carrier steps out of bounds.
  - d. A touchdown, PAT or safety is scored.
  - e. The ball-carrier’s knee or arm hits the ground.
  - f. The ball-carrier’s flag falls out.
  - g. The receiver catches the ball while in possession of one or no flag(s).
  - h. The 7 second pass clock expires.
  - i. Inadvertent whistle.



**NOTE: There are no fumbles.** The ball is spotted where it was at the time of the fumble. If a player had possession of the ball and it pops out, it cannot be intercepted as there are NO fumbles. It is a dead ball.

8. In the case of an inadvertent whistle, the offense has two options:
  - a. Take the ball where it was when the whistle blew, and the down is consumed.
  - b. Replay the down from the original line of scrimmage.
9. A team is allowed to use a timeout to question an official’s rule interpretation. If the official’s ruling is correct, the team will be charged a timeout. If the rule is interpreted incorrectly, the timeout will not be charged and the proper ruling will be enforced. Officials should all agree upon any controversial call in order to give each team the full benefit of each call.

## XI. Running

1. **Forward progress will be measured by where THE BALL is when the player's flag is pulled or when the player went out of bounds.**
2. The quarterback cannot directly run with the ball. The quarterback is the offensive player who receives the snap and possesses the ball. **If the ball hits off the QB's hands or body and then is caught by another player, that player is now considered the QB and cannot run the ball. (The first person to fully possess the snap is considered the QB.)**
3. Only direct handoffs behind the line of scrimmage are permitted. Handoffs may be in front, behind or to the side of the offensive player but must be behind the line of scrimmage. The offense may use multiple handoffs. There must be CLEAR separation on handoffs.
  - a. The QB is not allowed to handoff to the center on the first handoff of the play.
4. A single **UNDERHAND** toss will be allowed in the backfield provided it is backwards or lateral to the line of scrimmage. Screen passes and other forward passes behind the line are penalties. Anything remotely resembling an overhand or sidearm pass will be considered a penalty as well.
5. No-run Zones (**for all divisions except U6**) are located 5 yards before each end zone and 5 yards on either side of midfield are designed to avoid short-yardage power-running situations. Teams are not allowed to run in these zones if the subsequent line is LIVE. (Reminder: Each offensive team approaches only TWO no-run zones in each drive – one five (5) yards from midfield to gain the first down and one five (5) yards from the goal line to score a TD).
6. Any player who receives a handoff can throw the ball from behind the line of scrimmage.
7. Once the ball has been handed off in front, behind or to the side, all defensive players are eligible to rush.
8. **Diving, leaping, or jumping forward to avoid a flag pull (or for any reason) is considered flag guarding.**
9. Spinning is allowed. However, players spinning out of control will be called for flag guarding.
10. **Ball carriers MAY leave their feet for lateral or backwards jump cuts, QB pass attempts, and if there is a clear indication that he/she has done so to avoid collision with another player.**
11. No blocking or "screening" is allowed at any time.
12. Offensive players without the ball must stop their motion once the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage. No running with the ball-carrier is allowed.
13. Flag obstruction – All jerseys MUST be tucked or UNDER a player's belt before play begins. The flags must be on the player's hips and free from obstruction. Obstructed flags will be considered flag guarding.

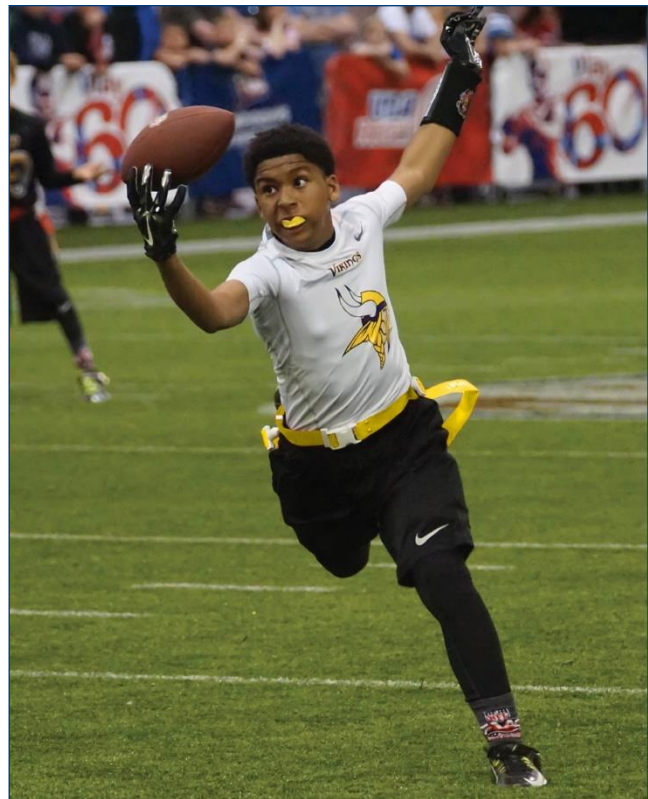


## XII. Passing

1. All passes must be from behind the line of scrimmage, thrown forward and received beyond the line of scrimmage.
  - a. All passes that do not cross the line of scrimmage, whether received or not, are illegal forward passes.
  - b. The quarterback may throw the ball away to avoid a sack, but that pass must go beyond the line of scrimmage.
2. Shovel passes ARE allowed but must be received beyond the line of scrimmage.
3. The quarterback has a seven-second “pass clock.” If a pass is not thrown within the seven seconds, the play is dead, the down is consumed and the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage. Once the ball is handed off, the 7-second rule is no longer in effect.
  - a. If the QB is standing in the end zone at the end of the 7-second clock, the ball is returned to the line of scrimmage (LOS).

## XIII. Receiving

1. All players are eligible to receive passes (including the quarterback if the ball has been handed off behind the line of scrimmage).
2. Only one player is allowed in motion at a time. All motion must be parallel to the line of scrimmage and no motion is permitted toward the line of scrimmage.
3. A player must have at least one foot in bounds when making a reception (and it must be the FIRST foot).
4. In the case of simultaneous possession by both an offensive and defensive player, possession is awarded to the offense.
5. Interceptions change the possession of the ball at the point of interception. Interceptions are the only changes of possession that do not start on the 5-yard line.
6. **Interceptions are returnable, including on conversions after touchdowns and are worth two (2) points.**



## XIV. Rushing the Passer

1. All players who rush the passer must be a minimum of seven yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped. Any number of players can rush the quarterback. Players not rushing the quarterback can defend on the line of scrimmage.
2. Once the ball is handed off, the seven-yard rule no longer is in effect and all defenders may go behind the line of scrimmage.
3. A special marker, or the referee, will designate a rush line seven yards from the line of scrimmage. Defensive players should verify they are in the correct position with the official on every play.
  - a. A legal rush is:
    - i. Any rush from a point 7 yards from the defensive line of scrimmage.
    - ii. A rush from anywhere on the field AFTER the ball has been handed off by the quarterback.
    - iii. If a rusher leaves the rush line early (breaks the 7 yard area), they may return to the rush line, reset, and then legally rush the quarterback.
    - iv. If a rusher leaves the rush line early and the ball is handed off before he/she crosses the line of scrimmage, he/she may legally rush the quarterback.
  - b. A penalty may be called if:
    - i. The rusher leaves the rush line before the snap AND crosses the line of scrimmage before a handoff or pass – illegal rush **(5 yards from the line of scrimmage and replay the down unless offense declines the penalty)**.
    - ii. Any defensive player crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped – offsides **(5 yards from line of scrimmage and replay the own unless the offense declines the penalty)**.
    - iii. Any defensive player not lined up at the rush line crosses the line of scrimmage before the ball is passed or handed off – illegal rush **(5 yards from the line of scrimmage and replay the down unless the offense declines the penalty)**.
  - c. Special circumstances:
    - i. A blitz is entitled to a STRAIGHT LINE to the QB. He or she may not intentionally veer into an offensive player. Doing so is a defensive penalty.
    - ii. **There is NO rushing the QB allowed at the U6 level.**
    - iii. Teams are not required to identify their rusher before the play.
    - iv. **Should the defense rush from further than two (2) yards on either side of the beanbag, impeding the rusher will not be called.**
4. Players rushing the quarterback may attempt to block a pass; however, NO contact can be made with the quarterback in any way. Blocking the pass or attempting to block the pass and then making contact with the passer will result in a roughing the passer penalty.
5. The offense cannot impede the rusher in any way. The rusher has the right to a STRAIGHT LINE to the quarterback. If that line is occupied by a moving offensive player, then it is the offense's responsibility to avoid the rusher. Any disruption to the rusher's path and/or contact will result in an impeding the rusher penalty. If an offensive player does NOT move after the snap, then it is the rusher's responsibility to go around the offensive player and to avoid contact.
6. A sack occurs if the quarterback's flags are pulled behind the line of scrimmage. The ball is placed where the quarterback's feet are when flag is pulled.
  - i. A safety is awarded if the sack takes place in the offensive team's end zone.

## XV. Flag Pulling

1. A legal flag pull takes place when the ball-carrier is in full possession of the ball.
2. Defenders can dive to pull flags but cannot tackle, hold or run through the ball-carrier when pulling flags.
3. It is illegal to attempt to strip or pull the ball from the ball-carrier's possession at any time.
4. If a player's flag inadvertently falls off during the play, the player is down immediately upon possession of the ball and the play ends. The ball is placed where the flag lands. **Should a running back take a handoff with only one flag, the play is whistled dead immediately.**
5. A defensive player may not intentionally pull the flags of a player who is not in possession of the ball.
6. Flag guarding is an attempt by the ball-carrier to obstruct the defender's access to the flags by stiff arming, dropping the head, hand, arm, football, shoulder, or covering the flags with the football jersey.

## XVI. The Last Two Minutes

1. In the last two (2) minutes of the game, teams can choose to go for an "onside kick" after a score. A team choosing an "onside kick" will have one (1) play to get from the 5 yard line to midfield.
2. Should a team obtain midfield, that team will have three (3) downs to score (except U6 which will have four (4) downs to score.)
3. Should the team fail to obtain midfield, the opposing team will take possession where the ball was spotted at the end of the "onside kick."
4. A team **MUST** have a timeout to choose to "onside kick." Teams without timeouts will **NOT** be permitted to use the "onside kick" option.
5. A timeout **WILL** be consumed by the "onside kick" options

## XVII. Formations

1. Offenses must have a minimum of one player on the line of scrimmage (the center) and up to four players on the line of scrimmage. The quarterback must be off the line of scrimmage.
  - a. One player at a time may go in motion 1-yard behind and parallel to the line of scrimmage.
  - b. No motion is allowed toward the line of scrimmage.
2. Movement by a player who is set or a player who runs toward the line of scrimmage while in motion is considered a false start.
3. The center must snap the ball with a rapid and continuous motion between his/her legs to a player in the backfield, and the ball must completely leave his/her hands.

## XVIII. Unsportsmanlike Conduct

1. If the field monitor or referee witnesses any acts of intentional tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, blocking or any unsportsmanlike act, the game will be stopped and the player will be given an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty. **Should a second such penalty occur, the player will be ejected from that game and suspended from the next game.** The decision is made at the referee's discretion. No appeals will be considered. FOUL PLAY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED!
2. Offensive or confrontational language is not allowed. Officials have the right to determine offensive language. **If offensive or confrontational language occurs, the referee will give an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty to that player, coach, or fan. If it continues, the player, coach, or fan will be ejected from the game and suspended for the next. Should three such penalties occur by the same team, that team will forfeit that game and the next game.**
3. Players may not physically or verbally abuse any opponent or official. This will result in the above.
4. Ball-carriers MUST make an effort to avoid defenders with an established position.
5. Defenders MUST give free releases off of the line of scrimmage. There is NO pressing or jamming. They are also not allowed to run through the ball-carrier when pulling flags.
6. Fans must also adhere to good sportsmanship as well or risk the above:
  - a. Yell to cheer on your players, not to harass officials or other teams.
  - b. Keep comments clean and profanity free.
7. Fans are required to keep fields safe and kids friendly:
  - a. Keep younger kids and equipment such as coolers, chairs and tents a minimum of 10 feet off the field in the end zone area.
  - b. **Stay behind the fan line at all times, not between fields.**
  - c. Dispose of ALL trash in designated trash cans.
8. Unsportsmanlike conduct penalties:
  - a. Defense + 10 yards from line of scrimmage and automatic first down
  - b. Offense - 10 yards from line of scrimmage and loss of down

## XIX. Penalties

### 1. General

1. The referee will call all penalties.
2. Referees determine incidental contact that may result from normal run of play.
3. All penalties will be assessed from the line of scrimmage, except as noted. (Spot fouls)
4. **Only the head coach** may ask the referee questions about rule clarification and interpretations. Players may not question calls.
5. Games may not end on a defensive penalty unless the offense declines it.
6. Penalties are assessed live ball then dead ball. Live ball penalties must be assessed before play is considered complete.
7. Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal yardage when the penalty yardage is more than half the distance to the goal.

### 2. Penalties

- i. **All offensive penalties will be assessed as five (5) yard penalties and loss of that down**
- ii. **All defensive penalties (barring exceptions) will be assessed as five (5) yard penalties**
- iii. **Defensive pass interference is a spot foul and automatic first down**
- iv. **Unsportsmanlike conduct on the offense is a ten (10) yard penalty and loss of down**
- v. **Unsportsmanlike conduct on the defense is a ten (10) yard penalty and automatic first down**

## XX. Mercy Rule

### General

1. **When a team goes up by twenty-four (24) or more points, mercy rule will be enforced.**
2. **On defense, the team that is winning by twenty-four (24) or more CANNOT rush the QB nor return interceptions. Interceptions will be downed at the spot they are caught.**
3. **On offense, U6 that are winning by twenty-four (24) or more will have ONLY FOUR (4) downs total to score.**
4. **On offense, U8 and up teams that are winning by twenty-four (24) or more will have ONLY THREE (3) downs total to score.**
5. **On offense, given the number of downs that teams in mercy rule have to score, there are NO fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) down options for U8 and up teams while they are in winning by mercy rule.**

## XXI. Playing Time

### General

1. **At the REC level, every player is expected to play at least 50% of the game whenever possible.**
2. **At the ADVANCED level, there is no play time rule. Coaches can opt to NOT play certain players or give only minimal playing time.**
3. **At U6, every player should get at least one (1) carry of the football.**
4. **Failure to follow these rules (at the REC level) could result in the forfeit of games and/or suspension of coaches.**