

In the spirit of friendly interscholastic competition:

Pregame

After equipment check, the announcer introduces one team and then the other. When announced, each team runs to the middle of the field for coin toss. Then teams run to the 5-yard line or their sideline to start the game.

Celebration

End zone celebrations are encouraged. This is the best time for teams to take pride in a successful team effort and/or individual achievement. They don't even have to be in the end zone (i.e., they aren't limited to touchdowns). The referee, at his/her discretion, may stop the clock for up to 20 seconds to allow a great celebration.

Postgame

When the game ends, instead of lining up to shake hands one at a time, all players and coaches take the field together. Approach the opposing players one-on-one or in small groups, like we see players do in the NFL.

Players are encouraged to interact with each other however they want. Fist bumps, half-hugs, compliments, etc. Whereas end zone celebrations focus on team success, the postgame celebration is meant to bring the teams together and demonstrate great sportsmanship and camaraderie amongst both the teams. Consider organizing "Shout-outs", below.

Coaches should confirm the game's final score with the head referee before leaving the field. Any disputes need to be recorded before the coach leaves the field.

Swearing

Swearing is a natural part of sports and of middle school. However, any participant -- player, volunteer, spectator -- can request we refrain from swearing at an event. The league stands behind any such request.

[Players may stop reading here, unless they want to learn more about how the league works.]

Balancing a game

Being competitive is a service to the other team. Until it's not.

We don't have mercy rules integrated into the game. However, with a small league, we know there'll be games where one team is clearly stronger. We retain the competitive nature of the league, and then do our best to maximize engagement and fun. It's not fun to know that a team is going easy on you, but it's also not fun to get blown out.

In a conference game, if a team is up by two scores and clearly dominant, we encourage that team to shift its focus somewhat away from scoring in this game, and towards improving its team for the future. For the moment, we'll call those shifts "handicaps". See examples below.

Required handicaps

In a games which is not a conference game because the teams are mismatched (see "Conference games", below), the stronger team is required to adopt enough handicaps to give the weaker team a shot at the win. Obviously this is very subjective; use your judgement. If the strong team loses, their chances at a bowl game are not affected (because it's not a conference game).

Play time

Everyone gets play time. This is subjective, too, of course. We recommend doing your best to target every player twice on offense, or having each player in a minimum of eight plays.

The play time guarantee does not apply to any player who skips practice or games. **Attendance is generally required** at practices and games. Please tell your coach in advance of any event you can't make.

Standings and championships

In each division (girls' and co-ed), the championship is awarded to the winner of the division's bowl game.

The division's top two teams are invited to the bowl game. See "FCA Ranking Rules", below. Essentially:

- Each team is ranked according to how many other teams they have a winning record against.
- Out-of-conference games are ignored in the win-loss record.

Conference games

For the most part, except when we play teams outside of our league, games are conference games.

However, when the coaches and commissioner agree to require handicaps to keep the game balanced, that game is out-of-conference. This is decided in advance and cannot be changed once the game starts. The idea is to let the stronger team shift its focus well away from the win.

As of the start of the season, Lincoln Lynx games are out of conference. The conference status of any game or team can be changed as the season goes on and team strengths become apparent. Contact the commissioner and opposing coach.

Handicaps (a partial list)

Coaches, none of these are meant to be done on the sly. Make your players aware that, to give the other team a good game, you're intentionally working on areas where your team is weak.

- Use your second string. Be more aggressive about rotating out your strong players. One automatic way to do this is a rule that every time your flag is pulled, you sub out. Or, always run your top receiver on a draw. Etc.
- On offense, give everyone a position they don't usually have.
- On defense: Stop rushing the passer; let the offense's plays develop and work on containing them to short yardage. Or just line up at 10 yards back instead of seven.
- Do calisthenics for 15 minutes before the game, and for 5 minutes at halftime. Not only will that balance today's game, it'll really help condition your team for future games.

Shout-outs

One possible postgame gathering is to toast the opposing players like they do in Ultimate Frisbee:

- Circle up as one team and have two players from each team give props to two players from the other team.
- Have them be specific with their praise. "Laniyah had a great interception today and juke'd two of our players on her return."
- Then, have two coaches from each team praise two players from the other team.
- Focus the praise on more beginning players: "Emily had a great attitude today. She hustled the whole game and was joking around. She really made it fun for everyone."
- We can adjust the amount of props that are given so this doesn't drag on too long or we can increase the amount of praise if kids are engaged.
- Wrap up by having the player of the game leading everyone in a group cheer: "Team on me – team on three – 1,2, 3, - team!"

FCA Ranking Rules

These ranking rules are pretty unconventional, but they allow us to give tougher schedules to stronger teams (thus increasing the number of balanced games in the season) without fear of disadvantaging them in the standings. The focus is not on individual games won, but on teams outperformed.

For season ranking purposes, team A "outperforms" team B if team A has won more conference games against team B than it has lost. Out-of-conference games are ignored.

A team's season record is the number of teams it outperformed, minus the number of teams that outperformed it.

Teams are ranked according to season record. Ties between two teams are resolved as follows, in order:

- 1) If one team outperformed the other team, that team is ranked higher.
- 2) If one team has a positive score differential (points scored minus points allowed) against the other, that team ranked higher.
- 3) The team with the higher score differential in all conference games is ranked higher.

Example. Say there are ten games in conference:

| Winner | Loser | Score |
|--------|-------|-------|
| A | B | ... |
| C | B | ... |
| A | C | ... |
| B | C | ... |
| D | B | ... |
| D | A | 19-12 |
| A | C | ... |
| B | A | ... |
| D | B | ... |
| A | D | 28-14 |

In this season:

- A outperformed C, so A gets +1 to its record, and C gets -1 to its record.
- D outperformed B, so D gets +1 to its record, and B gets -1 to its record.
- C outperformed B, so C gets +1 to its record, and B gets -1 to its record.

A and D both have total record of +1, so employ tiebreakers:

- First tiebreaker is win-loss record against each other (tied, 1-1).
- Second tiebreaker is score differential against each other (A wins by 5 pts).

Therefore the standings are:

1. A (+1, wins tiebreaker)
2. D (+1)
3. C (0)
4. B (-2)

(Advanced note: If necessary, outperformance can be inferred between two teams that didn't play each other. In that case, one team outperforms the other team if it has a better season record against common opponents. In our league, this would only be necessary if a team had a small number of conference games.)