

May 13, 2024

Refs, and fans/players who like to read long documents:

It became sort of clear, in a game last week, that flag problems and contact are not generally well understood. This results in more discontent on the sideline than we'd like. First, we couldn't have our games without refs. I love loud sidelines, but please don't yell at the refs. Conversely, please don't thank the refs for specific decisions they make. Ref interactions on the field are limited to the coaches and team captains. More on this at our [On Game Day](#) page. Now, on to the rule clarifications, and a proposal.

Contact

When the offensive player is carrying the ball and contacts a defender, what happens? For simplicity, I've paraphrased:

- **If the defender is stationary, contact is a foul by the offense. (Rule XVI.4)**
- **If the defender is moving, contact is a foul by the defense. (Rule XIV.2)**

By now I've heard a lot of ball-carriers say "Well, I didn't see her, because I was turning around." The important thing is: Blindness/ignorance can't excuse you from this penalty. That's because I don't want to give ball carriers a good reason to charge forward with their eyes closed. So the player is liable for knowing:

- Whether he/she's at risk of committing a contact foul (e.g., catch a pass, then turn around with force, then hit a stationary defender).
- Whether he/she's blocking while the ball is past the line of scrimmage. Receivers should be looking back for the pass, anyway.
- Whether his/her flag belt is on correctly (I'm about to get to that one).
- and so forth.

As you can see, the best way to avoid rule infractions is to **TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOURSELF.**

Flags

Flag guarding is an illegal act by the player (whether intentional or not) which makes it harder to pull their flag. A hand next to your flag, pushing away defender's hand, vertical motion off your feet, all these are flag guarding.

There are other incidents where flags are out of place. These are not flag guarding, and they aren't charged a penalty, **but they still end the play.** For example, if your flag falls out of your belt, the ball is considered down at that spot (Rule IX.7.f and XIV.4).

We interpret the rule to cover a broader set of cases. I've seen flag belts get twisted around; I've seen flag belts fall down around the player's knees; I've heard about a flag that flew up and got stuck between the ball and the player's arm during a catch. Fundamentally, these are the same case as when a flag falls out of the belt: if the flag isn't on the hip, the player cannot be stopped legally. At this point there is no way to avoid frustration for someone.

It stands to reason that we can't really let the play continue. This means, as the ball carrier, you want to avoid this situation.

And there are things you can do to avoid it! If you don't want a defender to easily twist your flag belt around, and you don't want your belt to fall off, tuck in your shirt and tighten your belt. If the belt won't tighten, put it back and get one that does. If you don't want to lose a touchdown because your flag wasn't on your hip, then check your flags before every play. It's as easy to learn that as it is, say, to learn to put your inside foot forward on the line of scrimmage. Again, the best way to avoid rule infractions is to TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOURSELF.

Clarification: Flags out of place are not penalized unless the ball carrier has taken some illegal act.

However, there are situations where a flag gets out of place and the defense wouldn't have been able to pull it anyway. So in the spirit of the game, the refs and I feel like an unpenalized flag out of place should only stop the play if the defense is in the vicinity. This is a common rule modification and I propose it now.

Modification:

Rule IX.7.f: Play is ruled "dead" when ... ~~The ball-carrier's flag falls out.~~ Either of the ball-carrier's flags is obstructed or no longer on the ball-carrier's hip, and a defender is within reach of where the flag should be.

Rule XIV.4-5: If a player's flag inadvertently falls off, or otherwise leaves the player's hip, or is inadvertently obstructed, during a play while that player has possession, the player is down immediately and the play ends as soon as a defender is within reach of where the flag should be. ~~The ball is placed where the flag lands.~~ If a player who has one or no flags in their belt takes possession of the ball, the play is dead at that spot on the field. as soon as a defender is within reach of where the flag should be.

If you object to the change, please let me know.

Thanks, and I look forward to seeing you cheering on the sidelines again.

Travis

Commissioner, Alameda Flag Football