

# FORWARD

## YOUTH FOOTBALL

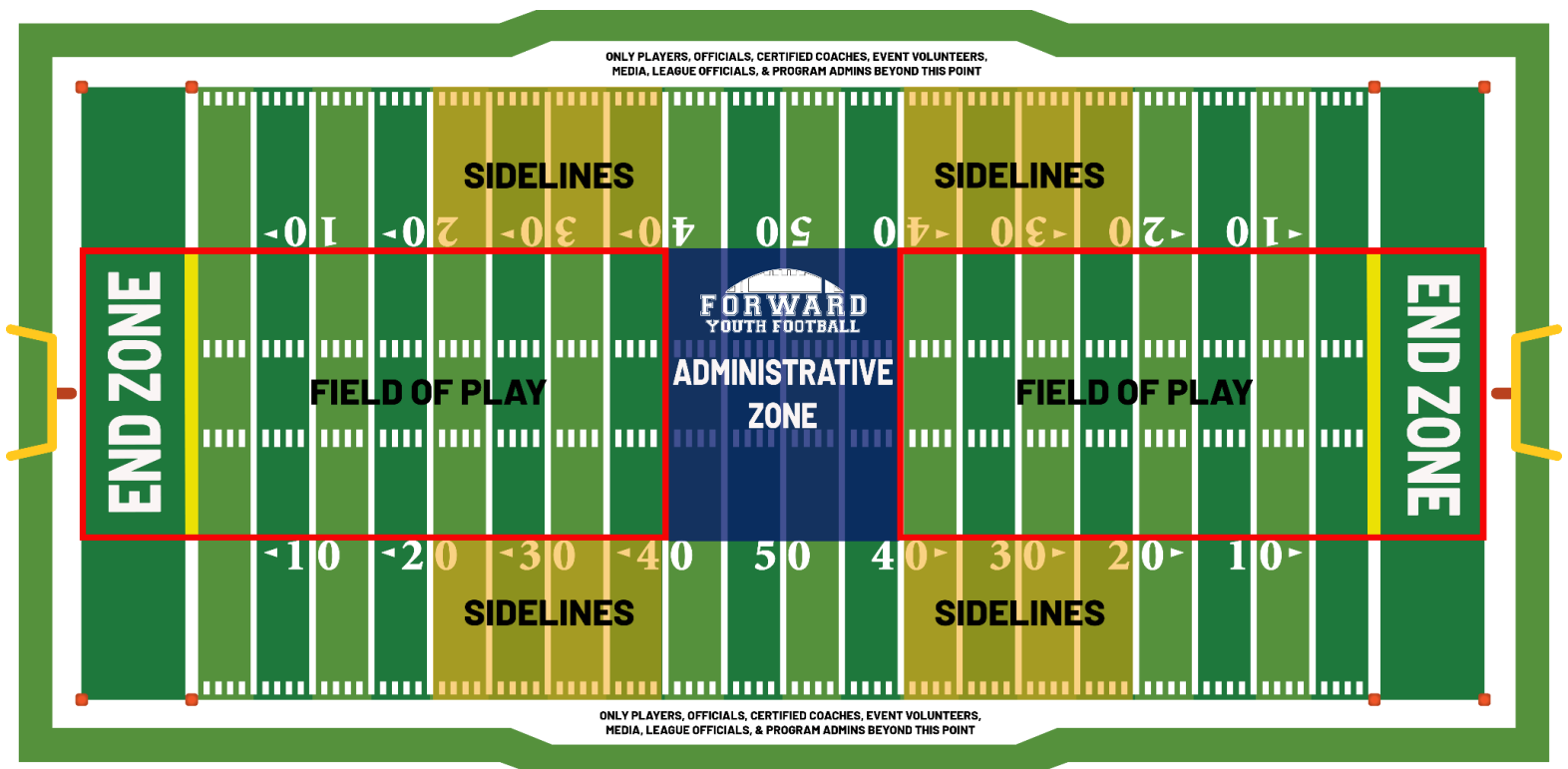
2026 SEASON



**ROOKIE TACKLE**  
**8-PLAYER RULE BOOK**

## Playing Field

1. The playing field is 40 x 35 1/3 yards, allowing for two fields to be created on a traditional 100yrd field at the same time. (9yrd or 27 ft in from side lines) 2. The sidelines extend between the inside of the numbers of a traditional football field and should be marked with cones every 5 yards. Use traditional pylons, if available, to mark the goal line and the back line of the end zone.
3. Additional cones can be placed between the five-yard stripes and in line with the inside of the numbers to further outline the playing surface if desired.
4. All possessions start at the 40 yard line going towards the end zone.
  - a. This leaves a 20 yard buffer zone between the two game fields for game administration and safety purposes. Game officials, league personnel, athlete trainers and designated coaches are allowed in this space.
  - b. The offensive huddle may take place in the Administrative Zone.
  - c. Players not in the game stand on traditional sidelines with one or more coaches to supervise.
  - d. The area between the standard sidelines and the field of play should be used for sidelines players and coaches. With the field split in two, this keeps players between the 20- and 40-yard line on each respective field or side.
5. First down, down markers and the chain gang are administered in accordance with National Federation (NFHS) or local rules- starting from the 40-yard line.



## Game Clock / Time / Timeouts

1. Games will be 4 quarters with a 12-minute running clock
  - a. Clock will ONLY stop on Penalties, time outs, scores, extra point or change of possession.
2. Each Team will be allowed 3-time outs per half.
3. A 30 second play clock will apply, but again lets only enforce this if a team is running way over. Teams will be given 3 warnings then result in a penalty.
4. Injuries
  - a. To prioritize player safety, the clock shall stop immediately when an injury occurs. It will resume only when the referee is ready to start.

## 8-Player Rules

### Weight Limit

1. 4<sup>th</sup> grade (95lbs+) , 5<sup>th</sup> grade (105lbs+) , 6<sup>th</sup> Grade (115lbs+) Any players over these weights is considered a blue star, see #3. Any coach/team that does not abide by weight limits can be questioned and player can be asked to be weighed, if the player is overweight, they will be disqualified from playing
2. Weights including name of player & number must be submitted to the league for all players on the Thursday prior to Fall Scrimmage which is scheduled on August 22, 2026 . Teams that do not submit information, games will be canceled.
3. **Blue Star Player Identification**

Blue Star players must be visibly identified for safety and eligibility enforcement:

  - a. A contrasting color stripe must run down the center of the helmet, from front to back.
  - b. The stripe must be clearly visible
  - c. Pre-game meetings at the coin toss to identify Blue Star players are no longer required.
4. **Blue Star Player Limitations**
  - a. Blue Stars are limited to on the line positions to ensure safety for all players:
    - i. May play Center, Guard, End (Tight or Wide) or QB (stricter limitations)
    - ii. Teams must have exactly five players on the line and set.
      1. If at QB, the play is blown dead if they roll outside the Guard or are touched by a defensive player.
      2. If playing end (tight or wide) and they catch a pass, the play is blown dead at the spot of the catch. The player should try to surrender by waving hand or taking a knee.
  - b. Blue Stars **may not** line up at Running Back or Slot Receiver under any circumstances.
5. **Team Splits for Programs with Large Rosters**
  - a. To promote playing time and development:
    - i. Programs with 21+ players in one grade are encouraged to form two teams.
    - ii. No single team should carry more than 21 players on its roster.
  - b. When splitting into two teams, rosters should be competitively balanced, rather than

forming an "A team" and a "B team."

- i. Rule of thumb: If the two teams were to play each other, the game should be competitive.

#### **6. Roster Swapping Between Teams in the Same Program**

- a. To preserve fairness and integrity, strict limits apply when sharing players between teams at the same grade level:
  - i. Allowed only if one team drops to 10 or fewer players.
  - ii. Players may only participate in two games with the other team per season.
  - iii. The replacement player must be of similar weight and ability (e.g., a Blue Star cannot replace a 50-lb player).
  - iv. Must be approved by both head coaches and program directors no later than the night before the game.
- b. Violations may lead to forfeits or further league discipline.

#### **7. Football Sizes by Grade Level**

- a. The Forward League uses Wilson football sizing as the official standard. Size numbers are provided for reference only and may vary by brand.
  - i. 4th Grade: Pee-Wee (approximately Size 5)
  - ii. 5th & 6th Grade: Junior (approximately Size 6)
  - iii. Each school may use the material of their choosing (ie. Leather or Composite) as long as the ball size falls within the league sizing standards based on their grade level.

#### **8. Face Shields / Visors**

- a. To comply with WIAA and NFHS safety rules:
  - i. Only clear face shields/visors are permitted during games.
  - ii. Tinted, mirrored, or colored visors are not allowed.
  - iii. The player's eyes must be clearly visible to referees, coaches, and trainers.

#### **9. Mouth Guards**

- a. Per WIAA, "only 1 mouth guard is allowed on person while on the field." Forward Youth football follows that same rule.

#### **10. Guardian Caps**

- a. Guardian caps will be optional for each program.

#### **11. Drones**

- a. Drones will not be permitted at any facility.

### **Game**

1. All Games take place on one half of the field with all possessions starting at the 40 yard line going towards the end zone.
2. A turnover on downs brings the ball back to the 40 yard line, and the teams switch from offense to defense, defense to offense.
3. Turnovers or interceptions or turnovers on fumbles are blown dead immediately. No returns area allowed to protect players from running toward the 20 yard Administration Zone between the fields. There are NO defensive touchdowns.
  - a. A fumble is not blown dead, only a turnover. A fumble is a live ball until it is recovered by a player, lands out of bounds, or approaches the Administrative Zone and officials

determine the play should be blown dead.

- i. Defense recoveries, as turnovers, ARE blown dead.
  - ii. An offensive player may recover and advance the ball.
4. After each play ran on offense, the ball is spotted in the middle of the field. Hash marks are not used. (If fields with grass need to adjust the spot to eliminate damage to the field, this is allowed and shall be discussed with the visiting team prior).
5. Because of the limited field size, all 15 yard penalties are enforced as 10 yard penalties
6. Contact with the center will result in a 10 yard penalty.
7. No penalty on the offense can take the ball beyond the 40 yard line to ensure the Administration Zone is free.
  - a. When a penalty occurs on or close to the 40 yard line, and the penalty yardage would take the ball back beyond the 40-yard line it is always a loss of down. The head coach of the defensive team must choose one of two enforcement options:
    - i. Double loss of down only with no yardage penalty, ball remains at original spot.
    - ii. Loss of down with yardage penalty enforced to the 40.
      1. Example: 5 Yard play with a penalty that brings the ball beyond back beyond the 40. Option 1: 3rd and 5, Option 2: 2nd and 10.
8. There are no defensive safeties. Tackles behind the 40 yard line are re-spotted at the 40 yard line with the offense still retaining the ball if downs remain.
9. An offensive player carrying the ball (running back or quarterback) that crosses the 50 yard line, is immediately blown dead. Ball gets placed back to the 40 yard line with a loss of down.
10. All personal foul penalties include an immediate required substitution from the field for a minimum of one play to allow coaches to address misconduct and promote good sportsmanship. We call this the “Cooling off period”. Two personal fouls by the same player will result in an ejection.
  - a. If a team does not have any substitutes for the game, coaches and officials should adapt to the league rule for 7v7. If a team cannot field the 7 player minimum they must forfeit.
  - b. If a team goes under the minimum player for a “cooling off period” both coaches may agree to let that player continue after coaches speak to that player in a timeout charged to that team.
11. All plays are blown dead, and the ball returned to the 40 yard line if an offensive ball-carrier or a fumbled ball crosses the midfield (50 yard line) or, at the officials discretion.

### **7 vs 7 Format Rule (Alternative Game Format)**

1. If a team cannot field an 8-player roster, the game may be played as 7v7 if agreed upon by both head coaches. If a team is below 7 players the game is forfeited to the team that has the league minimum players.
- 2.
3. **Offensive Alignment:**
  - a. 3 Linemen: Center, Left Guard, Right Guard
  - b. 1 Quarterback
  - c. 2 End
  - d. 1 Backfield Players (RB or split out at WR)
4. **Defensive Alignment:**
  - a. 2 Defensive Tackles

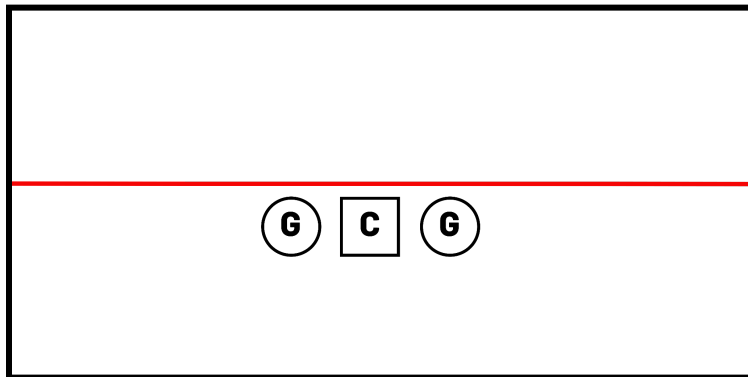
- b. 2 Defensive End
- c. 3 Linebackers
- d. No Safety

## **Special Teams**

1. There are NO special teams
  - a. There are no kickoffs or punts. Each possession starts with the ball on the 40 yard line, regardless of whether there is a score, turnover, or turnover on downs.
  - b. There are no extra points by a kick.
    - i. All PATs are attempted through a run or pass try. Coaches can choose to go for one point from the 3 yard line or two points from the 5 yard line.

## **Offensive adjustments**

1. Each play must include three offensive lineman- a center and two guards, one on either side of the center. These players are ineligible for first touch as the receiver of a pass.
  - a. Player rotations may result with traditional non-lineman numbers at these positions for the purpose of fundamentals skill development.



2. **Guards/Ends are required to play from a two-point stance.** There are no three-point stances, except for 6<sup>th</sup> graders who may play in a two-point or three-point stance.
3. The Center may only have his or her snapping hand down.
4. The distance between a guard and center may not exceed three feet (one yard) but may be closer.
5. Because of all players, all positions, all skills philosophy, players should change positions during the game. Therefore:
  - a. Once identified as an offensive lineman, players may not shift to another position.
  - b. All three offensive linemen are ineligible for first touch on a pass.
6. The quarterback-center exchange may be direct, pistol or shotgun.
7. Quarterback sneaks and quarterback draws are prohibited in all situations because the defense is not allowed to have players aligned over the center or in the center-guard A-gap.

8. The offense MUST have five players on the line of scrimmage.

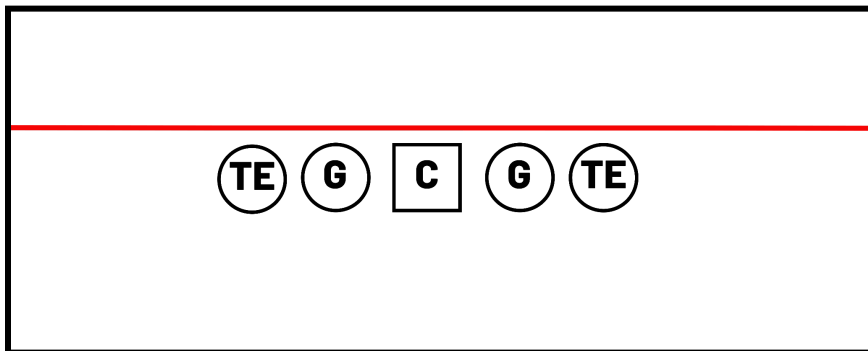
- 3 Linemen: Center, Left Guard, Right Guard
- 2 Ends (Tight or Wide)

9. There are NO unbalanced line / formations allowed. The split ends/tight ends must be on opposite sides of the center.

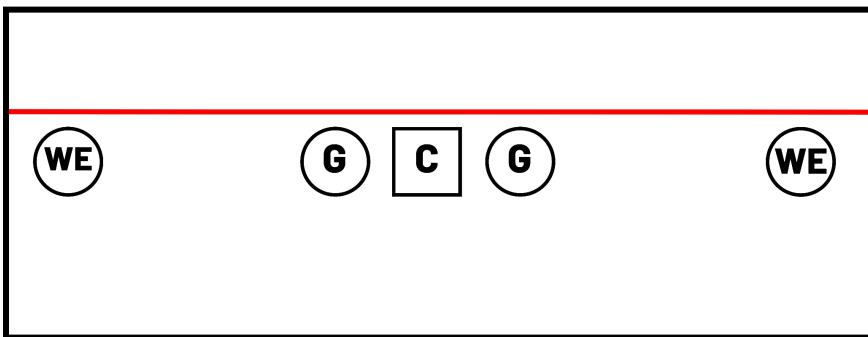
### Line Player Engagement Requirement

1. Any offensive player aligned on the line of scrimmage — including tight ends or wide ends aligned on the line — is considered a line player and must initiate legal head-up contact or blocking engagement with the defender aligned across from them before releasing into a route or advancing downfield.

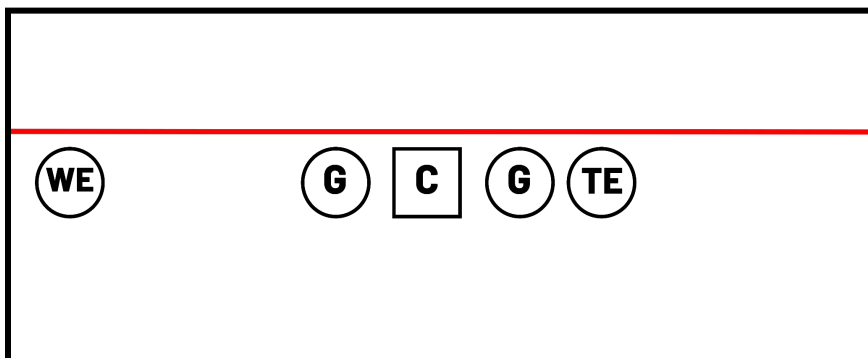
### Balanced Offensive Line



Or



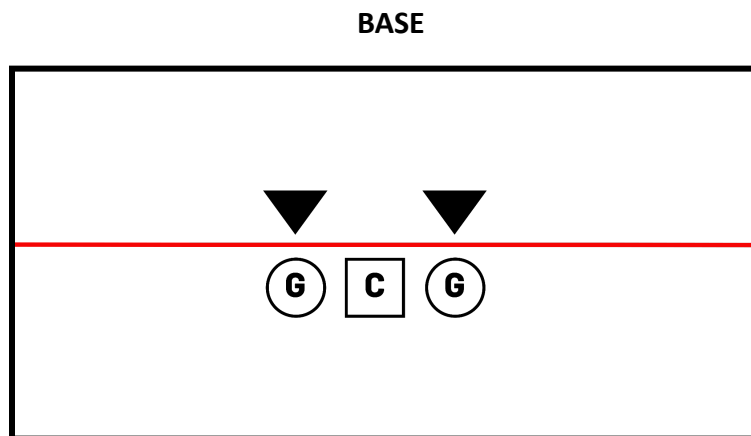
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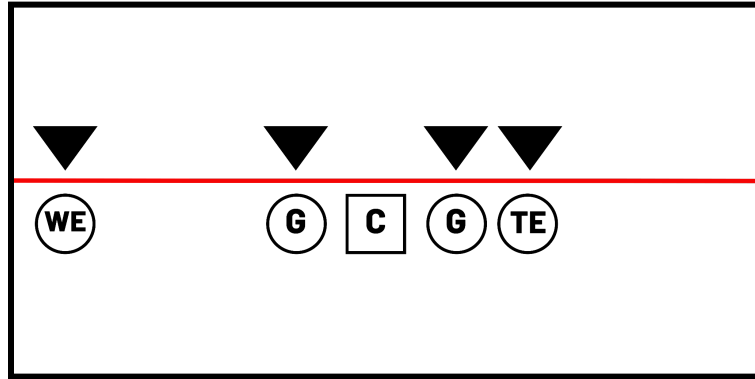
10. The five offensive players who are not playing guard or center may be deployed in positions at the coach's discretion if two are on the line of scrimmage and the formation is balanced.
- a. Multiple running backs, slot receivers, wing backs, etc., are allowed but also must be balanced.
11. Trips formations are not allowed.
- a. Trips are defined as any three players who are not the center, guard, or tackle on one side of the offensive formation.  
Example: Running Backs or Slot Receivers may not line up on the same side of the quarterback to make an uneven formation. Direct lineup behind the quarterback is considered neutral.
12. Motion is allowed if it does not form trips formation
13. All blocks below the waist by any player anywhere on the field is illegal.

### **Defensive Adjustments**

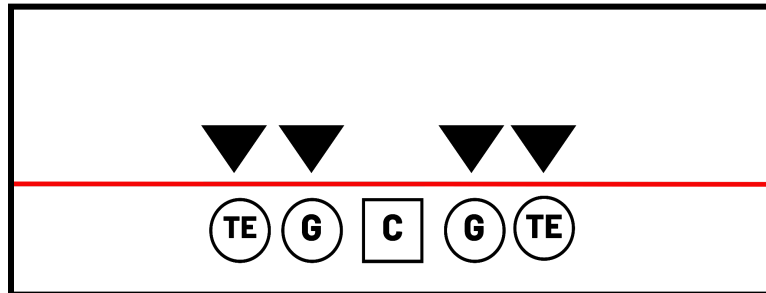
1. All players must play heads up with the offensive player on the line.



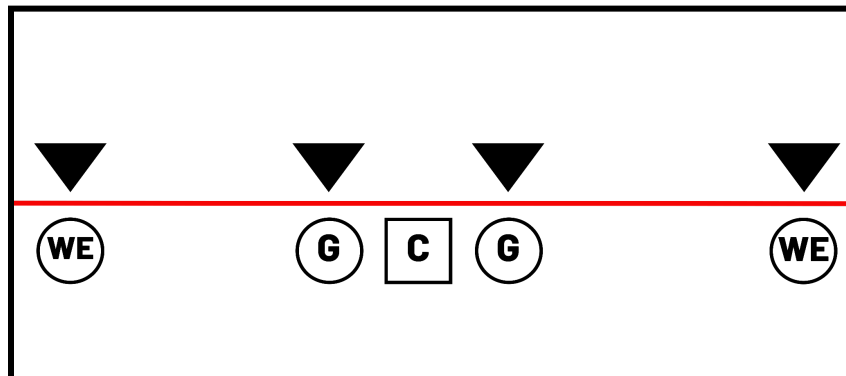
One Tight End



Two Tight Ends



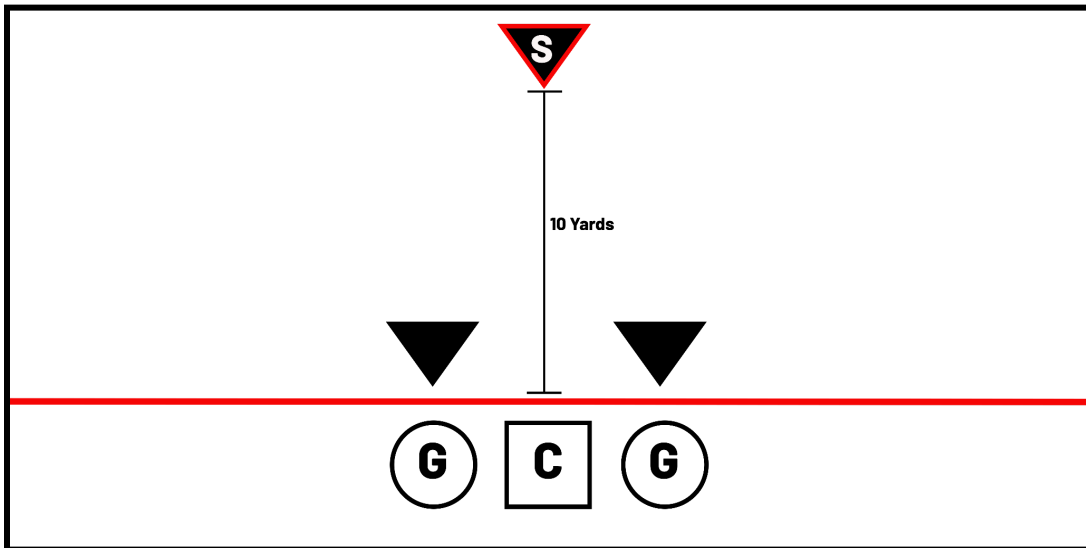
2. Must have a minimum of 4 defense players on the line of scrimmage always, lined up with an offensive player
  - a. 2 Defensive Tackles
  - b. 2 Defensive End



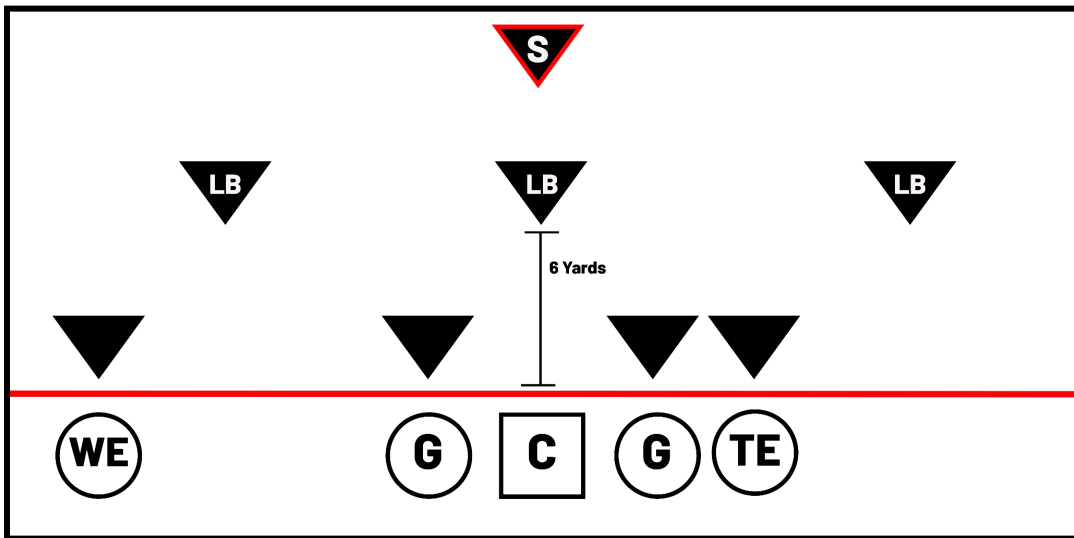
3. If the offense aligns with no tight ends, the defense must still align with four players on the line of scrimmage head up over the receivers they are covering.
4. All players playing on what is considered a line position for defence, tackles or ends (tight or wide

must make two hand contact with the offensive lineman that is in the same position .

- a. Deliberate stunting into A-Gap or Gaps is to be treated as an illegal procedure foul and enforced as a five-yard live ball penalty.
5. The defense cannot line anyone heads up over the Center on offense.



6. The defense must have one player at least 10 yards from the ball regardless of formation.



7. Defense must always be a 4/3/1 formation. 4 on the line, 3 line backers 6 yards back from the ball and 1 safety 10 yards from the ball. Unless you are playing 7v7. Please refer to the 7v7 adaptation of the rules.

8. No Blitzes
- a. Players within the box of snap cannot penetrate upon the snap. Linebackers, safeties, and cornerbacks (both on the line and at depth) can flow to the ball naturally after handoff is

made but predetermining penetration to a specific gap is illegal. This means that no safety or linebacker can move up to the line until the ball is clearly handed off, faked, fumbled or QB runs outside of the pocket.

- i. The box includes players who line up within two yards of the ball and on the line of scrimmage along with defensive players lined up directly over them.
    - ii. The restriction on blitzing is intended to encourage skill development within the passing game and allow young players to execute a successful handoff with limited penetration.
    - iii. . Illegal blitzes by a linebacker or defensive back shall be enforced as an illegal procedure foul and a five-yard live ball penalty. If continued blitzing is determined to be a product of coach encouragement, a 10-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty can occur.
  - b. On pass plays, anyone outside the box on the snap cannot rush the quarterback and must remain behind the line of scrimmage in pass coverage.
  - c. Coaches are encouraged to be creative with their formations but not use "the box" to delay defensive penetration.
9. If the ball is INSIDE the four-yard line, the four non-linemen, non-deep players may align on the goal line. Same goes for extra points played from the 3 yard line, defensive players may move up.
- a. The game clock will stop for extra points / Dead ball play.
  - b. Offensive touchdowns are worth six points.
  - c. PAT's are the coach's choice to attempt
    - i. one-point try from the three-yard line
    - ii. two point try from the five yard line.
  - d. With no special teams, there are no field goal attempts.
  - e. There are no defensive touchdowns as all turnovers are blown dead immediately. No returns are allowed to limit play back in the direction of the Administrative Zone.
  - f. There are no two-point defensive safeties.

### **Mercy Rule:**

1. If a team leads by 36 points or more, the following goes into effect:
  - a. A continuous running clock is used for the rest of the game.
  - b. The clock only stops for timeouts or injuries.
  - c. It does not stop between plays, for scores, or penalties.
  - d. The leading team may only attempt 1-point conversions (no 2-point tries).

### **24-Point Rule (Updated for Development):**

1. When a team leads by 24+ points:
  - a. Offense may only run the ball, however...
    - i. Blue Star players may line up at End and catch passes.
    - ii. If playing end (tight or wide) and they catch a pass, the play is blown dead at the spot of the catch. The player should try to surrender by waving hand or taking a knee.
    - iii. The player is encouraged to surrender by taking a knee or waving a hands

- iv. Blue Stars may not play running back or slot receiver.
- b. Defense must play normally.

**These rules support sportsmanship while allowing limited skill development for Blue Stars.**

### **On-Field Coaching**

- One coach is allowed on the field for the offense and one for the defense.
- All coaching must stop once the cadence begins.
- A second coach may be present on the field for video or photography purposes only but may not be in the huddle or provide any coaching instructions.

### **Coaching Requirements**

- All coaches must be USA Football Certified prior to the first scrimmage of the season.
- Proof of certification must be submitted to the Program Directors before participating in the league scrimmage.
- Coaches must sign off confirming they have watched the official Forward League Rules Explanation Video prior to the start of the scrimmage.
- Only certified coaches are permitted on the sideline with clear team credentials.
- Parents are not permitted on the sideline during games or scrimmages unless they are credentialed coaches, serving as approved event staff, or assisting in the event of a player injury. Non-compliant coaches will not be allowed on the sideline until these requirements are met.