

Coaching Youth Flag Football



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Coaching Youth Flag Football

A Child's Perspective

I vividly remember my first game playing youth football. I was 7 years old and I recall being extremely nervous. My fear did not come from playing the game itself, but from living up to the expectations of the parents and coaches standing on the sideline.

For the young player who has just been introduced to flag football, the prospect of actually playing on a real team with other players and carrying out specific responsibilities that the team requires can be an overwhelming proposition. Telling a young child, who is already overcome with concern and doubt about his abilities, to line up on left side of the “line” and run a “post corner” can be an exercise in frustration for both coach and player.

As an active youth flag football coach in Colorado Springs, CO, I fully realize the difficulties in, not only teaching young players the basics of the game and their position responsibilities, but further keeping their immediate focus and enthusiasm for the game.

Many youth flag football leagues in the United States put a tremendous emphasis on FUN for their young athletes. Unfortunately, young players often struggle to understand the fundamentals of the game and what their particular role is on the field. If a child becomes confused, frustrated, or overwhelmed with his/her assignment, the goal of FUN is never achieved. If a kid doesn't gain confidence and have FUN, they are likely to abandon the sport.

The concepts in this eBook are direct, not only from my own experiences, but also from the experiences, successes, and failures shared by other coaches throughout the United States.

Our tools are designed to make coaching easier, more efficient, and less time consuming on the field. It will also provide you a platform and tool to provide a perfect experience for each of the kids on your team.

A kid will only be a kid once. Let them enjoy it and challenge yourself to create an experience they will never forget!

Coaching Youth Flag Football Guide

Our Coaching Tools:

We have several tools available to improve your coaching experience. To add any of these inexpensive upgrades visit www.FlagFootballStrategies.com and login to your account.

1. **Downloadable Playbooks** – Strategies and plays for a successful season, all age groups.
2. **Downloadable Youth Coaching Guide** – *SIMPLIFY your game plan, improve communication, and GUARANTEE a great experience for your KIDS!*
3. **Flipbooks** - 8.5 x 11, high resolution printouts that clearly illustrate each player's assignment. Great for the younger kids ages 4 to 6 years old, but also for older kids if they want to illustrate the play to a group (huddle).
4. **Wristband Interactive** – Streamline communication by adding your playbook to every kid's wrist! Wristband Interactive also speeds up the huddle and increases playing time substantially. Great for all youth leagues, but recommended for ages 7 years and up.

The “5 Point Checklist”

The “5 point checklist” is the foundation for *successfully* coaching youth football. At the end of the football game, ask yourself the following:

Did I **build confidence** in the kids?

Did I **keep it simple**?

Did the **kids have FUN**?

Did they **learn something new**?

Did they **display good sportsmanship**?

If you can check each of the boxes above, then you were a great coach!

Building confidence

Many kids feel nervous, timid, or simply unsure about their abilities, even though they may be athletically gifted. Making their first catch, first long run, first interception, or first touchdown is a **BIG** deal! With a little confidence building, don't be surprised if you unleash a monster! A kid on my team, “Austin”, was a great example of this. He was scared of the ball, nervous about his performance, and didn't even want to be involved in the play. I

noticed that early, so in the first game of the season I ran him on a double reverse. Sixty (60) yards and a smile from ear to ear later, he was standing in the end zone in disbelief.

With each success, a young player becomes more confident and enthusiastic about playing the game. Today, “Austin” is the best player on my team.

We all have 2 or 3 plays in the playbook that are almost always successful (eg: The reverse, fake reverse, double pass). Save those plays for the kids that have little or no confidence and try to get them into the end zone! Save your more complex plays for the kids who already have the skills and confidence.

Keep it simple!

Simplicity is the key to coaching youth football. Whether you are coaching 4 year olds or 15 year olds, the same concepts apply. I only teach my kids what is critical to be successful. Excessive adult terminology and overly complex plays are a recipe for disaster.

Keep it fun

Remember, kids want (and deserve) to have fun. It is possible to keep them focused, well disciplined, AND have fun all at the same time. A kid will only be a kid once. *Let them enjoy it and challenge yourself to create an experience they will never forget!* If you make them laugh they will loosen up, have more fun, and probably even play better. “Bobby, we are running a double reverse and you are getting the ball. I want you to run like your pants are on fire”!

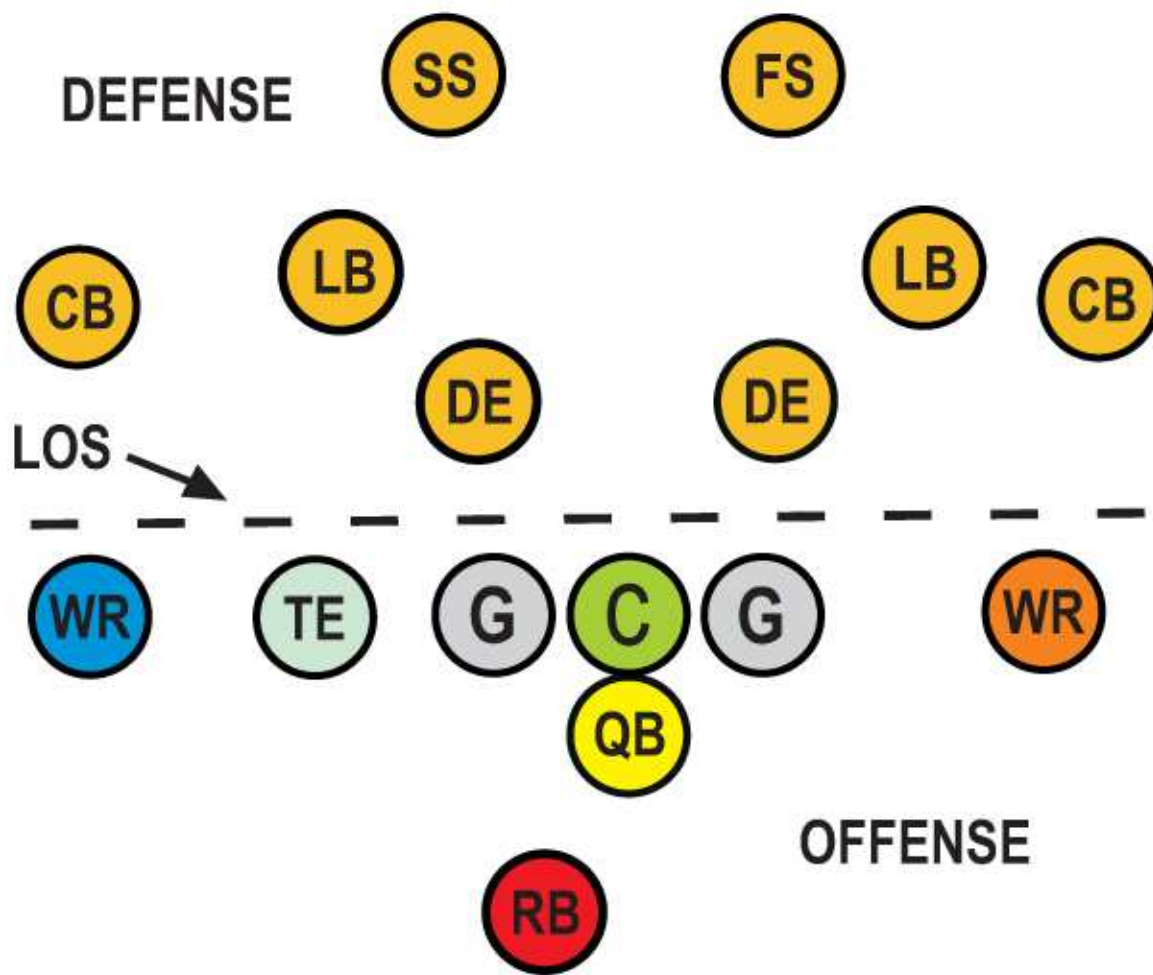
Help kids learn the game

Make it a point to teach the kids something NEW every week. Don’t just teach them how, teach them WHY? Kids are great learners and they always want to know “why”. Well, teach them why! “You are blitzing **because**... putting pressure on the quarterback will cause him to make a mistake”. “When catching a ball, you want to look the ball into your hands **because**... you are less likely to drop it”.

Sportsmanship

Take the time to help kids learn the values of sportsmanship. Honesty, integrity, respect, team work, and fair play will go a long ways not only on the field, but also in life. Recognize and reward your kids for displaying these great attributes.

Legend



C - Center
QB - Quarterback
RB - Running Back
FB - Fullback
TE - Tight End
WR - Wide Receiver

DE - Defensive End
LB - Linebacker
CB - Cornerback
FS - Free Safety
SS - Strong Safety
LOS - Line of Scrimmage

Practice

Most teams are only able to put in a couple hours of practice each week, if that. Cover as many things as you can in practice without skipping the fundamentals. You should plan out your practices, just as you do a game. Prior to practice, make a list of items that you want to address.

What you teach will vary from week to week based on what your team struggled with in their last game or what the kids need to be prepared for the next week. The list can range from catching balls to flag pulling. If your team struggled with coverage, then teach every aspect of coverage, from back peddling to intercepting the ball.

Practice should be fun and engaging for your players, never dull or boring. Fill your practices with games and drills that not only sharpen skills, but also keep them interested and focused on the task at hand.

Repetition is a key component to becoming good at anything in life. It is no different in flag football. Focus on fundamentals and practice catching, throwing, flag pulling, coverage, route running, blitzing, and hand-offs regularly. Coach with a “hands-on” approach and jump in there with the kids on drills and scrimmages. The players will get a kick out of it! Practice plenty of “in-game situations” like extra points, 4th and longs, and two minute offenses.

Your practice should always end on a good note. Finish practice with a fun drill or a scrimmage game, not sprints!

Offensive Drills

Passing Drills

Drill 1 - This is the easiest and most common passing drill.

Line your QB up with a line of receivers on the left or right side of the QB. Have the receivers run routes at the same time and the QB throw to one of them. You can add a DB into the mix to make it interesting.

Drill 2 - This drill helps with accuracy and decision making.

Have two receivers line up 5 yards apart and 10 yards away from the QB. Place one defender in between the receivers. Have your QB “thread the needle” and keep the ball out of the defenders reach.

Catching Drills

Drill 1 - This drill helps receivers catch unexpected or errant throws.

Have the WR line up 10 yards away from the QB with the WR's back to the QB. As soon as you say go, the QB will throw the ball at the WR and the WR should turn around and catch the ball. The WR will have no idea where the ball is going to be until the last second. The

WR should react quickly and snag the ball out of the air.

Drill 2 - This helps the receiver make quick decisions and improve catching dramatically.

Two QBs should stand next to each other, each holding two balls and facing the WR. The WR should stand 5 yards back facing the two QBs. When you give the signal, the first QB should throw the ball. As soon as the ball touches the WRs hand, the other QB should throw the ball. Repeat until all the balls are thrown.

Route Running Drills

The best way to improve route running is to practice, practice, practice. At first, break it down and go half speed, focusing in on the receiver's breaks. Do not throw any balls until the routes are run properly. Once the kid's routes are "crisp", start throwing balls to them. Have a contest to see which child runs the best routes and they will all compete and strive for perfection! The best receiver of all-time, Jerry Rice, was not the fastest, tallest, or the best jumper in the game. He did, however, run crisp discipline routes that set him apart from all the others.

Note: Kids do not understand depth like adults do. When calling out routes to younger kids, talk in terms of "steps" rather than yards or feet. In other words, run a "7 step hook" instead of a "7 yard hook". Have them count their steps when they run their routes. It will help!

Ball Carrying Drills

Drill 1 - This drill helps the ball carrier get better at cutting and juking.

Set up an obstacle course with cones. Tell your ball carrier to run and juke when they reach each cone. You can also use spins or back steps in place of jukes.

Drill 2 - This drill helps the ball carrier beat defenders in open space.

Set up a 5 x 7 yard square with cones. Place a defender in the middle. Have your ball carrier go one-on-one with a defender. See if the runner can make it to the other end without getting caught.

QB Mobility Drills

Drill 1 - This drill teaches QB mobility from an accelerated blitz.

Have the QB line up in shotgun behind the C. The C should snap the ball and run a 7 step hook. Have a defender blitz the QB, starting 3 yards closer than the usual blitz line location. For example: If your league's blitz line is 7 yards, then the BZ should line up 4 yards from the LOS. The QB should avoid the blitz as best as possible before hitting the C as the C turns and looks for the ball.

Drill 2 - This drill shows the QB why vision is important.

Have the QB line up in shotgun behind the C. Have a defender blitz the QB from the usual DB position from different angles. The QB should "elude" the defenders for 5 seconds before

they throw the ball.

Defensive Drills

Flag Pulling Drills

Drill 1 - This is a good flag pulling and vision drill.

Set up a 10 x10 yard square. Put all your players in the middle of the square. When you give the signal, each player must pull the other players flags while dodging others trying to pull their own flag. Last player standing wins. This is FUN! Your kids will love it.

Drill 2 - This is a great drill for taking angles and pulling flags.

Set up a 15 x 15 triangle yard with cones. Have two sets of lines, one on each bottom corner. One side is the ball carrier, the other the flag puller. When you give the signal, the ball carrier should sprint towards the point of the triangle while the flag puller cuts the ball carrier off before they reach either top cone.

Interception Drills

Drill 1 - This drill helps the DB “make a play” off a tipped ball.

Have a defender line up 5 yards from the QB. Have another defender line up 3 yards behind the first defender. Have the QB throw a high ball to the first defender. The first defender should then "tip" the ball backwards. The second defender then makes an attempt to intercept the ball.

Drill 2 - This drill helps teach receivers how to "jump" routes and steal the ball.

Have a WR line up 10 yards away from the QB. The defender should line up two yards behind the WR and 1 yard offset left or right. On your signal, the QB should throw the ball and the defender should then "jump" the ball, cutting the receiver off and intercepting the ball in stride.

Coverage Drills

Drill 1 - This drill helps teach reaction and foot work.

A WR and a defender should face each other, standing 1 yard apart. The WR should then shuffle left, right, forwards, and backwards. The defender should stick with the WR, matching their every move. It is also important that the barrier of 1 yard stays the same throughout the whole drill.

Drill 2 - This drill teaches how to make up speed and catch players from behind.

A WR faces down field. The defender lines up directly behind the WR so they are back to back. On your signal, the receiver will run straight forward. The defender then has to turn around and catch up to the WR before the ball is thrown by the QB.

Pursuit Drills

Drill 1 - This drill helps teach your team proper angles of pursuit.

Have your defense line up in their base defense. Your faster players should line up as close to the sideline as they can before going out of bounds. On your command, have a RB take a hand off and run across the LOS towards the end zone, giving him a slight head start. Once he has crossed 5 yards beyond the line of scrimmage, the defense can begin to chase him. Every defensive player needs to pursue the offense player aggressively. This teaches pursuit skill and team flag pulling concepts.

Drill 2 - This drill helps teach defenders how to "sniff" out a play.

Line up a center, a QB in shotgun, and two RBs in wishbone. Line up one defender 7 yards back. Once the center snaps the ball, the two RBs should run towards their nearest side line. The QB should then purposely stare down the RB he wants to hit. The defender should be watching the QB and then shuffle parallel with the LOS towards the RB the QB is eyeing. The QB should then throw the pass and the defender should burst toward the RB as he is receiving the ball. The defender should then cut the RB off and pull the flag before the RB can gain positive yards. Repeat this over and over. Each time, the QB should make it less obvious which RB he is targeting.

Blitzing Drills

Drill 1 - This drill helps reduce the time it takes to sack the QB.

Have the BZ attack the QB like they would in a regular game but add 3 more yards on to the designated spot. So if your league "blitz line" is 7 yards from the LOS, it should now be 10 yards. Have the BZ blitz from this new spot on your command. Count to five and if the QB is not sacked, then the QB wins. But if the BZ gets the sack, then the BZ wins. With this added yardage and time pressure, your BZ should have more urgency and focus when blitzing.

Drill 2 - This drill helps simulate WRs crossing through the BZ path to the QB.

The BZ should line up in their normal location. Strategically place cones in the BZ path. On your whistle, have the BZ attack the QB without knocking over any cones. The BZ should dodge the cones and still be able to get to the QB in a 5 second window.

Teaching Sportsmanship

Sportsmanship is one of the most important values you can teach in youth sports. Your players should learn:

1. Respect

Your players should respect other players, coaches, officials, and parents. Instead of spiking the ball in the end zone, teach the kids to politely hand it back to the referee. After pulling an opponent's flag, pick it up off the ground, hand it back to the player, and say "nice run".

2. Integrity

Help your kids develop good character by teaching fair play, honesty, and the “we” not “me” mentality. Having disrespectful, hypocritical, or boastful players will keep the team from having unity and chemistry.

3. Humility

Your players should always be humble and never boastful. Teach them that losing is ok as long as they did their best. They should always have a modest opinion of their own skills and importance to the team.

Winning and Losing

Remember, the kids see YOU as a role model. If you stomp off the field after a loss or fist-pump after a win, you are teaching the kids to do the same. Never over-celebrate a win or over-mourn a loss. When your team loses, be a good sport about it and congratulate the other team on their victory. Always congratulate your own players on a hard fought battle! At the end of a game, make sure your players make good eye contact, shake hands, and say “good game” with EACH of the opposing players prior to walking off the field.

Attitude - Giving 100%

Make sure your kids do their best and never give up. They should always give the game their all, whether your league is competitive or not. Full speed, focus, hustle, and the “never give up” attitude will go a long ways in sports AND in life.

Equal Playing Time

Sharing the Ball

It is crucial that everyone not only gets equal playing time, but also gets equal share of the ball. When you share the ball, it helps improve each player's skills and gives them in-game experience that is hard to simulate in practice and in drills. Sharing the ball also develops team work and team chemistry. This is essential if you want a healthy team atmosphere.

When you give the ball to your most talented player over and over, it reduces the other player's self-esteem and sense of worth. It also makes your offense one dimensional and shallow.

Some coaches feel that they waste time and downs when they give the ball to the younger or less experienced players. Most players will improve quickly if they are given a fair chance. Coaches shouldn't view inexperienced players as a burden. Consider it an opportunity to help develop that child, making him better and increasing his enjoyment of the game.

Substitutions

Insuring your players have fair playing time often proves to be one of the most difficult tasks of coaching flag football. Find a good rotation system that works efficiently and is not too complex. Sometimes it feels impossible to have 100% equal playing time for your players, but try to keep it as fair as possible. If one kid gets the ball more or less than everyone else

one week, equal it out the following week. Make sure you move your players around and do not let the same players play the same positions all the time. Make sure everyone gets a turn to play every position they want to play during the season. Some players will refuse to play certain positions, so do not force them or make them feel obligated to play a specific position if they don't want to. Make sure you have plenty of depth at every position, including QB. Avoid letting players feel that they are entitled to a certain position.

Tip: After a kid makes a big play or long touchdown, pull him out for a bit. Here are some reasons why:

1. He is excited because he just made a big play and would probably love to go "high 5" his parents.
2. Another kid can replace him and also get a chance to make a play
3. He is probably out of breath anyways!

This is a nice way to naturally rotate your players.

Offense - Player Descriptions/Responsibilities

Center (C)

The C lines up over the ball. The C's main responsibility is to give clean snaps to the QB. Also, the C is basically a receiver and can catch balls. Most of the time, Cs are over-looked by the defense and can be used as a dangerous weapon. The C can be very successful in short yardage and red zone situations. The C should try to keep a low profile during games and then expose the defense when it matters the most.

Quarter Back

The QB lines up directly behind the center, facing the opposing team's end zone. The QB can line up in two different spots, either under center (directly behind the center) or in shotgun (3-5 yards behind the center). The QB is the offensive captain and the leader of the offense. There are three major things that your QB should be able to do:

1. Protect the ball. Turnovers (interceptions) are detrimental to an offense.
2. Throw accurately. Accuracy is more important than arm strength.
3. Have mobility. QB should have the ability to scramble and elude the BZs.

It's fine if your QB doesn't have all three of these qualities, but two out of three would be helpful. You should practice with the QB before they begin throwing in the game. When you start a player that isn't ready to play this position, it will most likely result in bad play which embarrasses the player and/or reduces his confidence. Young players can get very upset over intercepted passes or even incomplete passes. Remember, build confidence carefully! Also, if the receivers aren't open, remember to tell your QB that it's okay to throw the ball away. A wasted down is much better than a turnover.

Running Back (RB)

The running back can line up in multiple locations but almost always lines up in the back field. Here are some formations your RB can set up in:

1. The "I" formation- 1 yard behind the QB.
2. Wishbone- 1 yard behind the QB but offset 2 yards from the ball
3. Spread- lined up like a WR.

The RB's main responsibilities are: making positive yards when running the ball, helping set up the pass, and catching out of the back field. Your RB should never be afraid of defenders and should always run forward, never moving laterally or backwards. The RB needs to show quickness and vision. "Power" running is not really an option with the no blocking rules so your RB should behave like a jack rabbit, not a rhino. Also, the RB needs to be able to dodge defenders in open space with virtually no contact. Lowering the shoulder, stiff arming, and hurdling are not appropriate ways to "shed" defenders. Jukes, spin moves, and back steps are the best options.

Full Back (FB)

The FB is basically the same as a RB except that the FB lines up between the QB and RB. The FB has no blocking duties and should be considered as another RB.

Wide Receiver (WR)

WRs can line up anywhere on the LOS. The WR's primary responsibility is to catch the ball for positive yardage. Ideally, the WR should catch the ball in stride, but should also be able to catch a large array of imperfect passes including high passes, low passes, and passes behind the WR. The WR should also be quick enough to beat coverage and get open. If your WR's aren't particularly fast, you can work around this with "crisp" route running techniques that will allow them to elude the DBs and get open.

Offense - Basic Skills and Fundamentals

Before you teach your players anything else, start with the basic fundamentals. Work on snapping the ball, performing clean handoffs, fake hand-offs, play action, pitches, short passes and basic route running. Give at least 40% of your practice and pre-game warm ups to "fundamental" routines. Otherwise, you will be haunted with mis-handoffs, bad snaps, and RBs crashing into each other in the back field. Here are a few flag football fundamentals:

"Blocking"

Blocking (or "screening") rules vary from league to league. In most youth flag football leagues, the rules for blocking are pretty sensitive. To keep it clean, have your players run up to the defender, STOP, then place his hands behind his back. You shouldn't actually "block" or touch the defender, but creating a little separation for one or two seconds is usually ok with the referee. Be careful not to shadow block. Shadow blocking is when a teammate/blocker runs down the field parallel with the runner, preventing the defense access to the runner's flags. This is a penalty in some leagues.

Running the Ball

There are three simple steps to running the ball:

1. The ball carrier should keep their body low to the ground. Flags low to the ground are harder to pull.
2. The ball carrier should keep their arms up. They should never swing or slap away defender's hands. This will result in a “flag guarding”, a universal penalty in flag football.
3. The ball carrier should run fast and be elusive. Encourage your plays to juke, cut, spin, back step, and duck past defenders. Remind them to never go backwards or make contact with defenders.

Catching the Ball

There are just a few steps in becoming a great receiver.

1. The player should always keep their “eye on the ball” and watch it into their hands. Concentration is key. Do NOT be scared of the ball. A receiver who is nervous or flinches is more likely to get hurt than a player who keeps his eye on the ball. Don't run until you catch the ball!
2. The receiver should always catch with their hands away from their body. Teach your players to not "T-Rex" and avoid keeping their arms tucked in too tight. Extend the arms towards the ball and catch it with your hands, not your body.
3. Hand placement - when the ball is thrown at the chest or higher, the player should spread their fingers outwards with their palms facing the ball and the two thumbs touching one another. When the ball is thrown low, the receiver should place their hands with their palms facing the sky and their pinkies touching.
4. The receiver should never attack the ball but absorb it. Catching should look natural and smooth.

Throwing the Ball

Placing the ball exactly where you want it can take years of practice. Even PROs make bad throws. Here are a few techniques and throwing mechanics players should know before playing QB.

1. The player's body should be parallel with the side line, never facing up field.
2. The passer must make sure that their feet aren't too close or too far apart. Their feet should be slightly wider than their hips.
3. The passer should grip the ball towards the end or the nose of the ball. They should never grip it in the middle. The QB's pinkie, ring, and middle fingers should rest on the grips while the thumb and pointer fingers grip the actual nose.
4. The passer should grip the ball at their chest, never below the sternum or above the chin. The arms should be bent with their elbows facing the ground. This allows for a faster release.

5. The passer should never drop their throwing arm before passing. The motion should look like a sling shot, not a windmill.
6. The first motion. When the passer finds an open receiver and decides to throw, they will perform the first passing motion. The passer should raise their elbow, making it parallel to the ground.
7. The passer should now load the ball, pulling it from the chest and placing it behind their head quickly. This should be done in a quick wiping motion, like a windshield wiper going full speed. Also, the passer's other arm should be bent and parallel to the ground with their non-passing hand pointing toward the side line. Simultaneously, the passer should shift his weight backwards, leaning on his back foot.
8. Now that the ball is loaded, the QB can fire. To do this, the passer rolls the elbow, bringing the ball over his shoulder passing his ear, and flings the ball forward to the receiver. While the ball is moving forward, the passer's weight should be too. While the passer's arm is coming forward, their other arm should drop to their side.
9. The passer should release the ball before their arm is completely straight. When releasing the ball, they should flick their wrist, giving the ball a spiral along with added velocity. The passer should now be leaning forward with all their weight on their front foot while their back leg lifts slightly off the ground at the point of release. The ball should roll smoothly off the finger tips, creating the required touch for a spiral.
10. The passer must follow through their pass. To do this, they should swing their arm toward their opposite hip. Passing the ball and swinging the arm should be done in one motion. The passer should always follow through.

The motions of a pass should be done in less than two seconds, from raising the elbow to swinging the arm.

Route Running

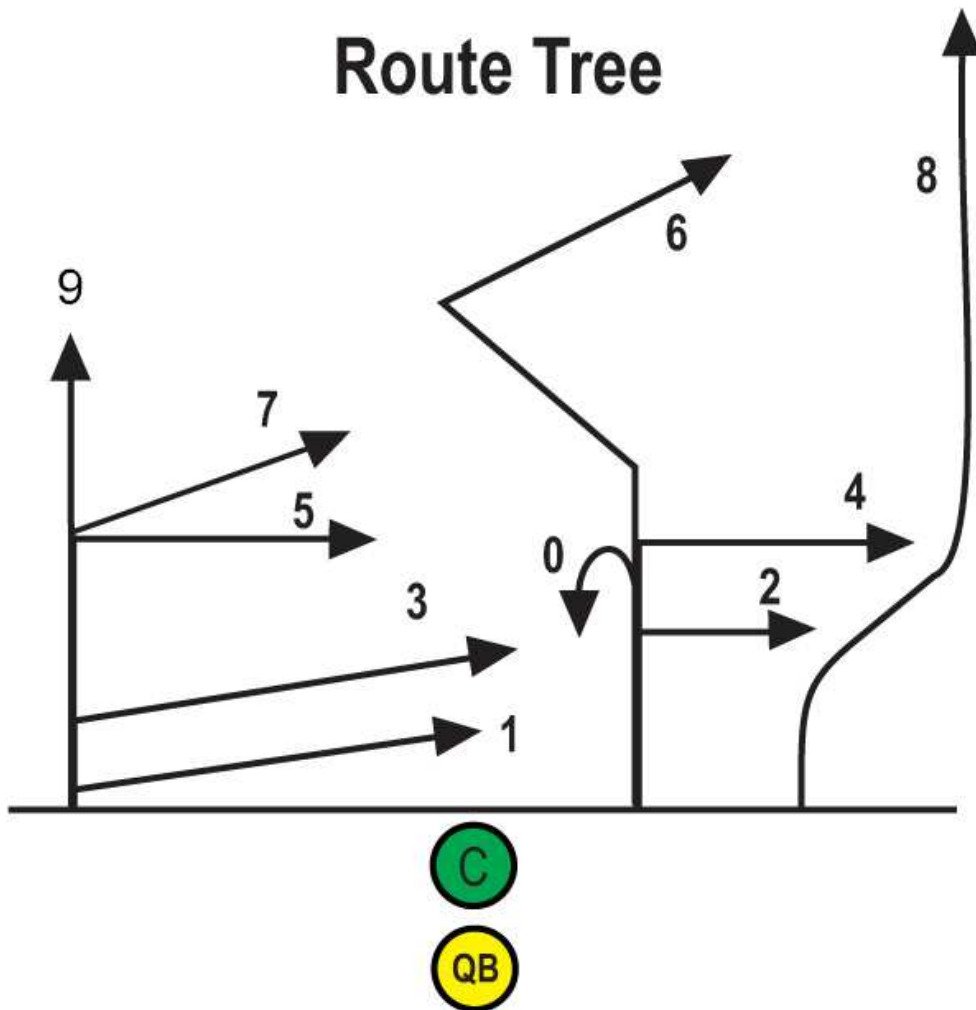
Route running is a great skill for all players to learn. It is also a great neutralizer for kids that aren't very fast. The goal of route running is to separate a WR from a DB so the WR can get open for a pass.

There are a few keys to becoming a great route runner:

1. Foot work - Receivers need clean foot work coming out of breaks.
2. Great vision - The receiver should always look for a way to break free.
3. Deception - The receiver should always be deceptive to their defender. This includes masking their true speed, being able to trick a defender into jumping routes when the ball isn't there, and making their defender believe they're going one way then break the other way.
4. Discipline - Receiver should run "crisp" routes exactly as they were drawn up. Cut hard at

each turn and do not take short cuts. For example, on a 5-n-in, the runner should run up 5 yards and cut in 90 degrees. Precision route running will allow the WR to separate from the LB and allow the QB to make a safe pass.

Below is a route tree that you might have your kids memorize. Notice that odd numbers go to the center of the field and even numbers go towards the sidelines. The same rules apply if the WR switches to the other side of the QB (odds run towards the center of the field, evens run to the sidelines. For example: A “4” route run from the left side of the QB would be an out (also), but to the left sideline not the right. A “3” route run from the right side of the quarterback would be a quick slant, but moving from the right to left (or center of the field)



Odd numbers run inward (center of field)

Even numbers run outward (sidelines)

Offensive Tips

Often times, a coach will have 8 or 10 formations in their playbook. Consider minimizing the number of formations you run. You can generally run 7 to 10 good plays in the same formation. If you select 2 or 3 good formations instead of 8 or 10, you can produce 20 to 30 good plays from those formations and greatly reduce the confusion on the field. Spend your practice time making sure your kids know each of the two or three formations frontwards and backwards, then implement your play calling around this more simplistic model. Once they know the formations, remembering the actual play becomes easy! Running the same formation over and over will also camouflage your offensive game play because every play will look the same as you line up on the ball.

Reducing your number of formations will:

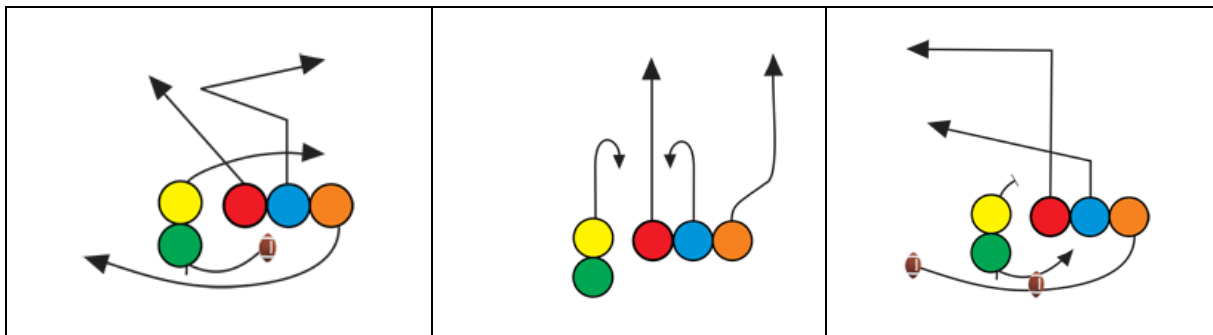
Make it easier for kids to remember and execute plays.

Make it easier to communicate plays from coaches to players and sidelines to huddles.

Make it more difficult for the opposing defenses to decipher your play.

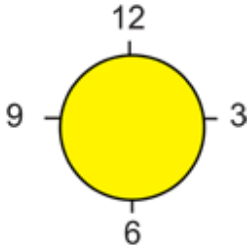
Figure 3 shows three different plays using ONE formation:

Figure Three

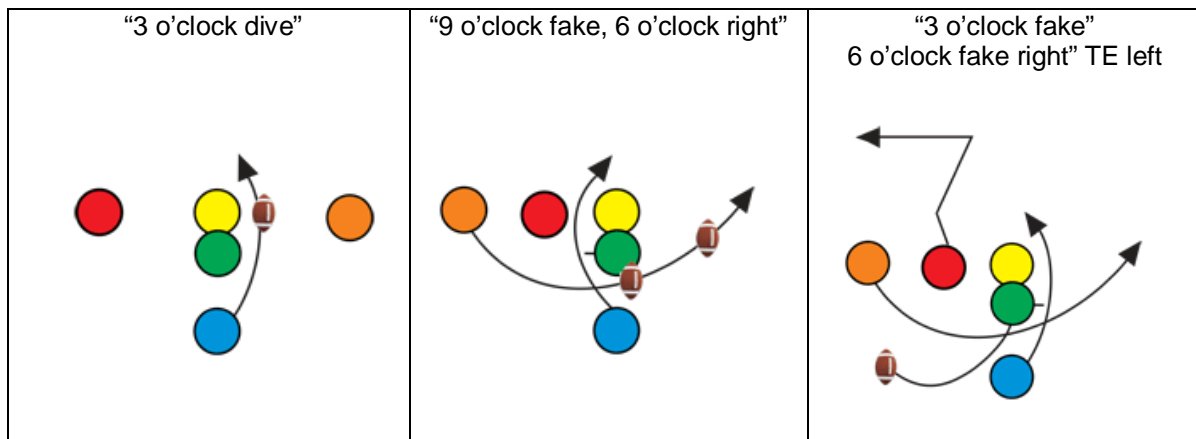


The Clock

By first grade, most kids know how the hands of a clock work. If they don't know the clock, take the time to teach them now. Here is how I use the clock and reduce communication time in the huddle:



"3 o'clock dive" is a hand off to the right side of the quarterback.
"6 o'clock cross" is a hand off behind the QB (left or right).
"9 o'clock dive" is a hand off to the left or right side of the QB.
"12 o'clock cross" is a hand off underneath the QB left or right.



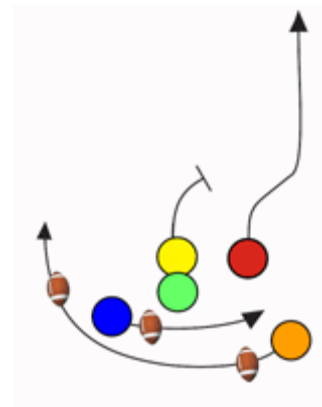
*Use the 6 o'clock plays as often as possible. On 6 o'clock plays, the quarterback can hide the ball with his body and confuse the defense. Since the QB's body is between the defense and the ball, the defenders cannot see the ball! Take advantage of it.

Misdirection

Misdirection is the single most effective way to beat a defense. Misdirection is the art of making a defense think a play is going one way, when it is actually going the other. The key to successful misdirection is freezing the defense for one or two seconds and then attacking the opposite side they think you are attacking. Pull them one way and go the other.

Reverse

The reverse is perhaps the most effective offensive play in youth football. There are several ways you can run a reverse. The only key requirement is that you get the defense going one way and reversing the direction of the play quickly. Run a reverse a few times and then run a fake reverse. It's almost always a touchdown.



Bootleg

A bootleg is a form of play action that allows the quarterback to fake a handoff and then

scramble outside of the pocket. The bootleg opens up the secondary and allows the quarterback to locate his receiver while scrambling out of the pocket. Generally the quarterback should scramble to the side that favors his throwing arm.

Statue of Liberty

Who can resist running a Statue of Liberty, especially after Boise State successfully brought it back to life against Oklahoma a few years ago in the Orange bowl? In a statue of liberty, (which kids absolutely love) the Quarterback drops back, pulls his arm back like he is going to pass, then, out of nowhere, a teammate runs by and snags it out of his hands and heads the other direction.

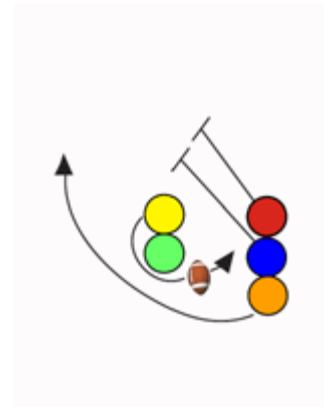
Play action

Play action is a fake handoff designed to make the defense think the play is a run. It will generally pull the defense up to the line of scrimmage, creating vulnerabilities in the secondary or the flats. Play action is a great option for throwing the longer passes and creating confusion within a defense. The fake handoff also takes a few seconds to mature and it allows the receivers to get further down the field by the time the ball is thrown.

Fumblersoski

Don't forget your center or linemen as potential playmakers.

The "Silly Sammy Circle" (form of the fumblersoski) is one of my most successful plays ever! You first establish a pattern of a 6 o'clock cross (left). On the next play (or soon thereafter), fake the 6 o'clock cross left to the RB, then do a real 6 o'clock cross to the center, who quietly sneaks around the QB counterclockwise. **Touchdown!**



Because the QB is facing 6 o'clock opposite of the defense, the defense can't see the ball. Everyone assumes the running back is getting the ball and cheats to the left. By the time the defense figures it out, it's too late. My team will score a touchdown on this play 75% of the time. Save this play for the slower child that needs a score!

Effective Play Calling

Naming your plays

Name your plays something they will remember. Silly names will stick in their mind and double their memory retention. The one thing that I do remember from my memory courses is that the human brain remembers the abstract much better than the normal or mundane. Name the plays what you want but make them memorable. Examples: Donald Duck Dive (3 o'clock), Silly Sammy Circle (6 o'clock), Crisscross Applesauce, etc. Obviously, your play names should vary as kids get older, but making a name obscure will be more memorable, even if they do think it's a little goofy.

Setting up the defense

Lets assume you have a playbook filled with easy, yet effective plays and a good system for naming your plays. Now you need to know which plays to use and call in different situations. You can start off the game three ways:

1. Using the run to set up the pass.
2. Using the pass to set up the run.
3. Going "west coast" and using the short pass to setup the long ball and the run at the same time.

You should feel the defense out: What scheme do they use? Are they a good passing defense, running defense, or both? Do they have a fast BZ? You can usually answer these questions in the first two plays. Try a running play then a passing play or vice-versa. That leaves you with two more downs to attack their weak spots. If they have exceptional coverage skills and keep your QB from completing a pass, run the ball. If their CBs are great flag pullers, run right up the middle. Suck the defense in, then strike deep with a play action pass.

Use height as an advantage. If one of your WRs is considerably taller than their defender, throw a jump ball right over the defender's head. Try to find the holes in the defense. Find a spot where no one covers and attack it. Find bad habits and techniques from defenders and exploit them. If a CB has poor speed, send your WR on a streak. If the defense takes poor angles, run a sweep and burn it up the side line.

Inexperienced Players

The best way to accelerate in-game experience is to be part of the action nearly every play. One way to do this is to have less experienced players play center. This means they touch the ball every play and are in the middle of the action. The center can watch and learn from the other experienced players. Constantly snapping the ball will be helpful to increase in-game experience as clean snaps are crucial to your team's success. Now the player can gain an edge in advancing their skills by having plenty of snaps on offense.

Final Notes:

1. Protect the ball - At any level of football, including the PROS, turnovers almost always determine the final outcome of a game.

Consider this scenario. Team A plays Team B and the match up is perfect. All athletes and coaches have the same skill level:

Team A: Gets 7 drives (attempts to score)

Team B: Gets 3 drives (attempts to score)

Who will typically win this game? Team A, right?

Well... this is what happens if Team B throws 2 interceptions. They have two less drives and Team A gets two more drives – a “swing” of 4 drives.

If you want to win tough games, you MUST win the turnover ratio!

Since there are no fumbles in flag football, turnovers (interceptions) will almost always come from your QB. Pull your QB aside and train him that an incompletion or a sack is much better than throwing an interception. Have him practice throwing the ball away if coverage is tight. Never be careless with the ball! Protecting it should be your main priority.

2. Extra points – making your extra points are the second most important aspect of running a successful offense. Have a specific plan in place for your extra points. Many coaches blow this off as unimportant, but I have found that 50% of youth flag football games are determined by just a few points. This is usually because one team made the extra point and the other team didn't. For example, both teams may score three touchdowns, but the difference is the extra point tries (22-18).

3. Remember, every player will bring a different skill or gift to the table. Make sure you play to each player's skills. If you play to their skills, they will obviously play better. If they play better, you will build their confidence. A guy who is really fast but can't catch well might be a RB. The really smart kid that is somewhat slow might be a good QB.

3. Rhythm is an important part of an offense. Try to chain together a good set of positive plays starting with easier plays to build confidence in the offense, especially in the early drives of the game.

4. Do not be afraid to throw in a trick play every once in a while. This keeps things exciting for your team and the kids will love it.

5. Use ONE play to set up another. For example, run a 5-n-out a few times and throw a short pass to your receiver near the side line. Now the DB thinks you will do it again so he is likely to make a move on the next ball thrown. After your WR runs a 5-n-out, have your QB pump the ball then lob it deep for the touchdown.

5. Operate out of shotgun as much as possible. It adds another 3-5 yards for the BZ to run. If you are doing this with younger kids, practice that snap!

Defensive positions and responsibilities

Safety

In a single safety set, the safety should line up directly over the ball 10-15 yards from the LOS. The safety's primary responsibility is to make sure no offensive player gets behind him and the play always stays in front of him. Since the safety is the last line of defense, they should have solid flag pulling skills to prevent big plays and/or touchdowns. The safety must be willing to fight for jump balls and be aggressive enough to chase down RBs that have escaped the first lines of defense. In the event that there are 2 safeties, the field is split in half creating a right side and a left side. Safeties should be fast, alert, and have good hands for intercepting or swatting down balls.

Designated Zones - The safety should cover the whole field 15 yards from the LOS and back.

Corner back

The CB should line up 3-5 yards from the LOS, depending on the speed of the receiver. Their inside shoulder should line up with the farthest WR's outside foot in order to keep the play to the inside. The CB's primary responsibility is to contain the sidelines and make sure the play stays inside. This mainly includes pass coverage but also some run stopping. The CB needs to have coverage, back peddling, and flag pulling skills. The CB must be able to hold down zones and also play man coverage. The CB must be willing to swat/intercept balls and chase down ball carriers. Your CBs should be fast. A good set of hands doesn't hurt either!

Designated Zones - Each CB has a zone on their respected side. The zones range from the LOS and back 15 yards. The zones, which are on the right and left sides of the field, should only reach about 7 yards wide.

Line Backer

The LB should line up directly over the ball 7 yards from the LOS. The LB has two primary responsibilities, run stopping and pass coverage. The LB must have great vision and take efficient angles when chasing down the ball carriers. The LB also needs to have great reflexes and decision making skills. The LB is covering the most common weak spot on the defense, the center of the field. For pass coverage, the LB should keep their eye on receivers crossing through the middle of the field in addition to keeping an eye on the QB. The LB is one of the main weapons in shutting down the running game. Good flag pulling skills will help in the LB position.

Designated Zones - The LB zone is from the LOS back 15 yards. The zone is located in the middle of the defense. The LB's zone should reach across the field with each side ending where the CB's zone starts. When a DT is in the line up, the LB's zone is pushed back 5 yards.

Blitzer

The BZ is a dynamic and extremely important position. The BZ is the anchor of the defense and his performance will often determine the outcome of each play, even the game! The BZ lines up at the "Blitz line" which is usually 7 yards from the LOS, depending on your league rules. The BZ should line up two yards off set from the ball, and his primary responsibility is to pressure the QB. Sacking or hurrying the QB is the primary goal. A pressured QB will make mistakes. Mistakes lead to big plays for the defense. The BZ is also the main run stopper because the BZ will be in the back field before anyone else. If the BZ can't pull the QB's flags, he should chase the QB towards other defensive players.

Defensive Tackle

The DT should line up directly over the ball 2-3 yards from the LOS. The DT should always obey rules regarding passing the LOS before the ball is handed off. The DT should be run stopper first, pass defender second. The DT responsibilities include penetrating the LOS and stopping the RB. The back field may be crowded so if the DT can't reach the ball carrier, he should chase him to a defensive player who can pull the flag. If the ball is not handed off, the DT should drop into a zone and shut down potential pass routes like flats and screens. The DT does not have to be fast but solid flag pulling skills are important.

Designated Zones - The DT's zone is located along the LOS on the right or left side, and should only be about 3 to 5 yards deep.

Defensive Ends

The DE's primary responsibility is to STAY HOME and protect against sweeps, reverses, screen passes, or flat routes. He should also avoid letting a ball carrier get around him on the outside or sideline part of the field. The DE should always beat the runner to the sideline, forcing him back to the inside of the field where other defenders can help out. This player should be fast and also a good flag puller.

Defensive skills and fundamentals

Flag Pulling

When pulling flags, the defensive player must remember six things:

1. Keep their eyes on the ball carrier's belly button. The ball carrier will try to "joke" the flag puller with quick movements from the head, arms, legs, and hips, but their belly isn't going anywhere so the player should always focus on the runner's belly.
2. The defensive player must be relaxed and loose, never tense. Keep bent knees and be ready to lunge in any direction.
3. The flag puller must be the aggressor. He should never back down from the ball carrier and should wait for the runner to come to him.
4. The player should never plant one foot and reach for the flag. He should always keep a shuffle with his feet and be prepared to lunge if the runner quickly changes directions.
5. The flag puller should always use two hands when going after flags. This is the best technique and it doubles the chance of a successful flag pull.
6. The flag puller should never yank a flag off. Instead, the player should squeeze the flag and let the ball carrier run out of their own flags. This reduces the chance of missing flags.

Back Peddling

Back peddling, a helpful defensive skill, is easy to teach and it will become natural to players once they learn the technique. Back peddling is running backwards so you can cover the receiver and watch the quarterback at the same time. There are a few simple steps to become a great back peddler:

1. The defensive player's body should always stay low to the ground in a squatting position with the defender's weight forward, standing on the balls of their feet. This not only helps keep balance but makes the defender a loaded spring, ready to pounce on any balls that come their way.
2. The defender's arms should be pumping. This helps with balance and also makes the whole

motion smoother and less awkward. The motion of back peddling should look clean.

3. The defender should always keep their feet low to the ground, almost dragging them. This also helps the defender change directions and break quickly. When the back peddler raises their feet too high off the ground, it makes them less explosive and have slower reaction time.

4. When starting to back peddle, the defender should never make "false steps" or turn his hips the opposite way the receiver is going.

5. The defender should always keep their head up, never looking down at their feet or the receiver's feet. This makes the back peddler more aware of their surroundings and puts them in a better position to make a play.

Blitzing

Blitzing is the most vital part of successful flag football defense. An effective blitzing plan will shut down any offense. Here are a few simple steps for blitzing:

1. The BZ should always line up behind the designated blitzing spot and two yards to the left so that when he blitzes, it pushes the QB onto his back foot which will cause forced or inaccurate passes.

2. The BZ needs to sprint towards the QB every time, never "half speed". The BZ should slow down once they are in the back field to avoid over pursuing the play. Sub the BZ out with fresh legs often since they will get tired.

3. The BZ should always keep their left hand up to swat away the ball as it leaves the QB's hand (assuming the QB is right handed and is passing). The BZ should never hit the QB's throwing arm or hand. It also allows the QB a great chance to escape. The BZ's right hand should be down reaching for the QB's flag.

4. The BZ should never jump in the air to distract the QB. This just wastes time when the BZ could be sacking the QB. The BZ should be one of your fastest players on the team and also be a good flag puller.

Selecting a Defense

Typically for youth flag football, zone defenses are the best option. It's very easy to teach and is usually the most effective. For 4-man, since there are so few players on the field, man-to-man is usually the best option. Take a look at the differences:

Man Defense

Man defense is coverage where every defensive back is assigned to a particular player. Instead of being responsible for a certain area (zone), they are responsible for an offensive player no matter where he goes on the field.

If a WR gets away from the defender, there is usually no back up support from any other players. In most cases, the CBs are the ones that play man-to-man but safeties and LBs can too. When defenders play man defense, the defender must choose the appropriate distance

from the WR prior to the snap. If the WR is faster than the defender, then the defender needs to give the WR a good cushion of space. If the defender lines up too close to the WR, the chances of getting beat right off the line are very high. If the WR is slower than the defender, then the defender can give the WR a smaller cushion. When setting up your players in man defense, try to line up your defenders so they are equal in height, speed, and skill of the offensive player they are guarding. To be successful at man, follow these steps:

1. The defender needs to have good back peddling skills.
2. The defender must know when to turn his hips and run with the receiver. "Turning" with the receiver means the defender comes out of their back peddle and transitions into a forward sprint to follow their receiver. The CB should always be on their receiver's hip. Playing on the inside hip (hip closest to the ball) is more risky but can yield big results. Playing on the outside hip (the hip closer to the end zone) is safer because you keep the play in front of you.
3. The defender needs to be aggressive enough to swat away balls or intercept if the opportunity is right.
4. Never look at the QB. Keep your eyes on your receiver's waist.
5. Give a second effort. Even if the receiver catches the ball, the defender needs to go for the flag.

Zone Defense

Unlike man defense where you have to cover a specific receiver, zone defense is guarding a specific area. If receivers enter your "zone" or area, you are responsible for them as long as they are in your zone. Sometimes you might have several receivers in your zone, so be ready. In zone defense, it's ok and recommended to look at the QB (unlike in man coverage). Here are a few tips for playing zone defense:

1. The defender always needs to have the receivers in front of them. The defender can't make a play when the receivers are behind them.
2. The defender should try to stay in the middle of their zone and try not to move too close to any edge.
3. The defender should always be prepared to cover multiple receivers at one time and stay in the middle of the receivers if there is more than one in your zone.
4. The safety should always try to assist if a zone gets over loaded.
5. Once the ball has been passed to a receiver, the defenders are free to attack the ball but should always be wary of cut backs.

Tips to run Successful Defense-

There are several steps to running a successful defense. With a little practice, your team can

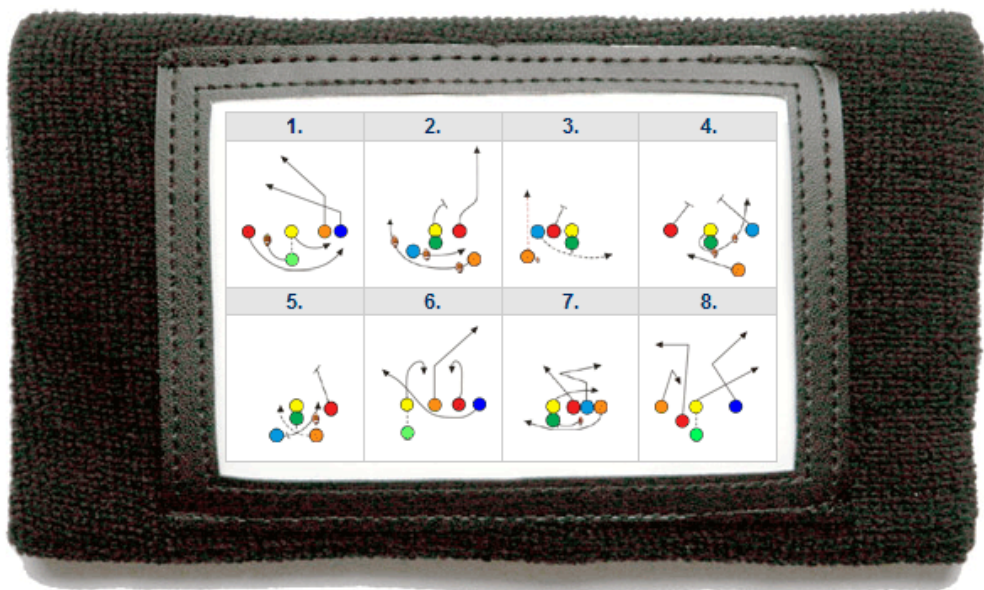
master these steps:

1. Your team needs to have good communication and team work.
2. Your team should always be looking for an opportunity, from bad passes to tipped balls. Good defense creates offense!
3. Your defense is only as good as your flag pulling. You should practice flag pulling regularly.
4. A good defense plays their toughest on 3rd and 4th downs, the last two minutes, and during final games. Make sure your team is ready to stop the big plays.
5. Make sure you have a good rotation. A tired defender is a vulnerable defender.
6. Make sure your kids attack the ball and “team tackle” (pull flags together). Never give up on a play.

Wristband Interactive (best for ages 7 and up)

Wristband Interactive is an online tool that allows you to mobilize your playbook. To try it, login to our web site and browse through hundreds of plays in our online library. Select the 8 best plays for the wristbands and print out the play inserts. Now slide your plays into each player’s wristband.

Every player should have a wristband, not just the quarterback. With a wristband on every player, you simply call the play (1 thru 8) and everyone instantly knows their assignment. Imagine a playbook that every child has on their wrist at all times. This is the perfect tool, regardless of experience level or sophistication, to develop a simplistic and efficient game plan that kids can easily understand.



Wristband Interactive Features:

1. Clearly Illustrated run and pass plays.
2. Ability to modify the plays at any time.
3. Color-coded assignments for each position.
4. Better coach-to-player communication.
5. Better player-to-player communication.
6. Easy-to-use play numbering system.
7. Speeds up the huddle and allows for more playing time.

Approximately 65% of a football game is spent in the huddle or in transition from play to play. Parents and player's complaints typically revolve around lack of "ball touches" or playing time. If you can speed up your huddle or eliminate them, you can almost double the amount of playing time for each kid on your team. With our wristband technology, simply call out a number (1 thru 8) and everyone instantly knows their assignment.

Wristband Tips: *All key players should have a wristband, not just the quarterback!*

When calling a play at the line of scrimmage, make the last number of the play the "real number". "Red 337" would be play # 7 on the wristband. "Blue 12" would be play # 2 on the wristband. Throwing in decoys will help keep the defense honest! If you add an "F" on the end of an audible ("black 242 F") that means it's play # 2, but flipped. In other words, everyone runs their same route, but on the opposite side of the field. For example, a WR running an "out and up" on the right side of the field would instead run an "out and up" on the left side of the field.

All of the features and benefits of Wristband Interactive are designed with one ultimate goal in mind.. Simplify the game and make it more FUN for the kids!

Flipbooks

Flipbooks are 8.5 x 11, high resolution print outs designed to illustrate a play to a large group. These are great for huddles since the plays are large, color-coded, and easy to read. While flipbooks are great for all ages, including adults, they are very effective for the younger kids that need a simplistic view of the play. Flipbook upgrades are inexpensive and available on the web site. Create tabs or sections in your flipbook and organize a section for your run plays, pass plays, trick plays, and 2 point conversions. This will speed up your play calling and allow you to stay organized in the heat of the battle!



Top 10 tips for a successful season

1. **Flag football playbook** - an architect would never attempt to build a house without a blue print or "plans". Just the same, a team should never show up to a game without good plays or an organized game plan. Make sure you have reliable flag football plays and your teammates have access to it.

2. Wristbands - having your flag football playbook "portable" is also important. Determine what your top plays are and transfer them to your wristband. Not only will this help to hurry up offense, but it also reduces time in the huddle.

3. Pressure the opposing QB - Even the best QBs play poorly when they get too much pressure. Get in there and get in there fast! Most interceptions are created by excessive defensive pressure. Often times, the slower players are used to rush the QB. Instead, send your fastest and most athletic players after that QB! Speed and agility are needed to really shake things up. Keeping "fresh legs" for BZs is also important, so plan on rotating players every few plays.

4. Pitch the ball! - In most flag football leagues, a fumble is a dead ball. Because of this, pitching the ball is a MUST. The risk-reward continuum is outstanding in your favor and your team should take full advantage of this. Flipping the ball is a team concept and everyone should be thinking "flip". Just be sure that your players know that they can only flip it behind them. The chance of you turning a short yardage play into a touch down far outweighs the possibility of a turn over.

5. Keep it fun - Kids want to have fun. Let a kid be a kid. Laugh with them and enjoy your time out on the field. There will be plenty of time later in life to be stressed, competitive, and over worked – now is not the time.

6. Play to the talents – All kids have special skills. Some kids have the ability to think through complex situations and react well on their feet. Other kids have great hands, good speed, or an uncanny ability to pull flags. Put your players where they are likely to perform best. Good performance = confidence building!

7. Turnovers - Avoiding turnovers is the most critical component of the game. When the game begins, you can assume that your team will get 6 drives (possessions) and your opponent will get 6 drives. If you throw 2 interceptions, they get 8 drives and you get 4. All things equal, this is a tremendous obstacle to over come. Since almost all turnovers are passes, train your QB to be wise. On those low percentages or dangerous throws, don't force it. Just throw it away!

8. Extra Points - Since there are no kicking extra points in youth flag football, the 1 or 2 point conversion is critical. Spend a substantial part of your planning time working on the conversions. If both teams score the same amount of touchdowns, which happens quite often, the deciding factor will often be determined who makes the extra points.

9. Misdirection - Misdirection is the single most effective way to beat a defense. Misdirection is the art of making a defense think a play is going one way when, in fact, it's going the other. The key to successful misdirection is to freeze the defense for one or two seconds, then attack the opposite side they think you are attacking. Pull them one way and then go the other.

10. Pulling flags - Every missed flag means 7 more yards for the other team. Make sure you practice grabbing flags. This is often overlooked but very important in stopping your opponent's offense.

We thank you for your purchase and we wish you the best of luck with your season!

Sincerely,

Management
Wristband Interactive, LLC