

Herndon Optimist NFL Flag Football (HONFL) League Rules, Procedures, Guidelines, and Policies

1.0 Purpose

These Herndon Optimist NFL Flag Football (HONFL) League Rules, Procedures, Guidelines, and Policies (“HONFL League Rules”) are written to insure a balanced blend of sportsmanship, recreation, skill development and competitive activity in keeping with the intent and spirit of the Herndon Optimist Club. Anyone attempting to negate the intent of these shall be denied participation in League programs.

2.0 General Rules

The League reserves the right to interpret and modify these rules as needed to ensure the desired philosophy and playing experience achieved.

2.1 Prevailing Rules

All games shall be played and officiated in accordance with the current NFL Flag Rules. The objective of the HONFL League Rules is to complement the NFL Flag Rules to enhance the opportunities for all participants and to ensure that the proper recreational football environment is maintained. In the event there is a conflict between the NFL Flag Rules and the HONFL League Rules or a situation not covered in the NFL Flag Rules, HONFL League Rules will apply.

2.2 Uniforms

The following HONFL League Rules amend the NFL Flag Rules in section IV. Equipment

Players must wear game jerseys issued by the League unless a waiver has been granted by the League Commissioner.

Shorts or pants with belt loops or pockets are not permitted to be worn in HONFL games. It is not permissible to use tape or adhesive to seal pockets but pockets may be sewn shut if approved by league officials at game time.

All players are required to wear cleats during HONFL games. Metal cleats or spikes are not permitted for use in games or practices.

Players without an appropriate uniform will not be allowed to participate in HONFL games.

2.3 Game Timing

The following HONFL League Rules amend the NFL Flag Rules in section VII. Timing and Overtime

2.3.1 Change of Possession

In addition to the NFL Flag Rules on change of possession (see VII.8.e), a change of possession will occur after a safety. The team that is awarded the two points will receive the ball.

Herndon Optimist NFL Flag Football (HONFL) League Rules, Procedures, Guidelines, and Policies

2.3.2 Mercy Rule

In a game that ends early because of the mercy rule, the two teams will return to the sideline, line-up, shake hands, and the coaches will meet to decide how to spend the remaining scheduled time. A 5 minute break will be allotted for coaches to address their teams before play is continued.

2.3.3 Half Time

The length of Halftime is 5 minutes.

2.4 Code of Conduct

The following HONFL League Rules amend the NFL Flag Rules in section XVII. Unsportsmanlike Conduct

2.4.1 Code of Conduct Enforcement

All coaches, players, and parents/guardians of players must be provided copies of the HONFL Code of Conduct prior at the start of the season. The HONFL Code of Conduct for players and spectators must be thoroughly discussed by the coaches at a pre-season joint meeting between coaches, players and parents/guardians of players. All coaches, parents/guardians, and players are required to sign the HONFL Code of Conduct Acknowledgment Form indicating they understand and accept their responsibilities as stated in the HONFL Code of Conduct.

The League Commissioner will determine appropriate penalties and must approve permission for any suspended player, coach, or spectator to participate in games subsequent to the incident for which they were ejected. All rulings by the League Commissioner will be expedient provided that both coaches and game officials report the facts relative to the ejection promptly.

The League Commissioner reserves the right to make decisions when coach, player, or spectator conduct falls outside of the HONFL Code of Conduct and requires disciplinary action. When penalties for rule violations are not specified, they will be decided by the League Commissioner.

2.4.2 Reporting of Code of Conduct Violations

If a player, coach, or spectator is ejected from a game by a game official or League Commissioner or Board Member, they should be notified at the time as to the cause of the ejection. An email by the ejecting official explaining the reason(s) for the ejection should be sent to the League Commissioner within twenty-four (24) hours of the incident.

Herndon Optimist NFL Flag Football (HONFL) League Rules, Procedures, Guidelines, and Policies

If a coach, player, or spectator is ejected from a game, both team coaches are responsible for filing a written report to the League Commissioner within twenty-four (24) hours of the incident and providing the name of the ejected player, coach, or spectator. Any coach who fails to abide by this rule is subject to suspension.

2.4.3 Player Celebrations

Teams are permitted and encouraged to celebrate after scoring a touchdown. The celebration may not be directed towards another player, coach or opposing spectators.

2.5 Penalties

The following HONFL League Rules amend the NFL Flag Rules in section XVIII. Penalties.

I. General

1. Play can continue after a referee calls a defensive penalty.
2. Play immediately stops after a referee calls an offensive penalty.

II. Spot Fouls

Unsportsmanlike Conduct – 1 st offense	-15 yards and loss of down or +15 yards and automatic first down
Unsportsmanlike Conduct – 2 nd offense	Ejection of offender from game field

IV. Offensive Penalties

Extra Player on Field	-5 yards from line of scrimmage & Loss of Down
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2.6 Playing Time

The following HONFL League Rules are in addition to the NFL Flag Rules.

Adequate and equitable playing time is a key component of the HONFL League. Every player **MUST** have a starting position on either offense or defense. There are no substitutions of players allowed until there is a change in ball possession, except when a player becomes injured or sick. When there is a change in ball possession, **ALL** players on the sidelines must come into the game. For example, when a team has 9 players and there is a change in ball possession, 4 players from the team must come off the field, and all of the 4 players that were on the sidelines must come onto the field and stay on the field until the next change in ball possession.

There can be no more than 5 players on the field at any one time. A sixth player cannot be used to run a play onto the field and then run off.

Herndon Optimist NFL Flag Football (HONFL) League Rules, Procedures, Guidelines, and Policies

2.6.1 Exceptions to Playing Time Rule

2.6.1.1 Player Injury

In the case of an injury existing prior to start of game, the coach of the injured player shall notify the opposing coach and game official of the player's injury before the game is started. If a player is injured during play of the game, and the injury is minor and the player, in the judgment of the coach, can return without risk of further injury, then the coach is obligated to return the player to the game at the next change in possession.

2.6.1.2 Player Health Condition

Registration records have healthcare conditions listed. At the beginning of the season, the coach should review this information and a discussion should occur with the parent/guardian concerning playing time conditions.

If a player has a recurring health condition, such as asthma, or if a player is recovering from an injury or illness, the coach should always err on the side of caution. If, in the judgment of the parent, the child can play without endangering his or her health, but stamina is an issue, the coach should inform the opposing coach and game official prior to the start of the game. In this case, if the player needs to come out of the game, he/she should be treated like an injured player above. However, abuse or misuse of this rule could result in a suspension of the coach.

2.6.1.3 Absence from Practice or Games

If a player misses practice regularly, adjustment of minimum play time will be permitted. If a player repeatedly fails to attend team practices and/or games without notifying the coach or without reasonable excuse (illness, injury, school, work, etc.), the minimum playing requirement may be waived, provided:

The coach has made all players and their parents aware of the possible consequences if a player repeatedly misses practices and/or games.

The coach notifies the League Commissioner at least forty-eight (48) hours prior to a game and obtains approval to invoke this rule.

Herndon Optimist NFL Flag Football (HONFL) League Rules, Procedures, Guidelines, and Policies

Once the approval from the League Commissioner is obtained, the coach informs the player and his/her parents of the consequences at least twenty-four (24) hours prior to the game.

The coach notifies the opposing coach and game official of this disciplining action prior to the start of the game.

Intentionally asking a player not to show up or asking a player to show up late will not be tolerated.

The ability to invoke this rule does not include a situation where a player has a regular conflict or prolonged illness which prohibits him or her from making the team's regularly scheduled practice. If a player has a regular conflict with his team's scheduled practice, the coach should make the League Commissioner aware of this conflict. The League Commissioner should try to move this player to another team so that he or she will be able to practice with minimal conflicts.

2.6.1.4 Disqualification

If a player is disqualified from the game due to ejection by the game official, then no minimum playing time applies.

2.6.1.5 Early Departure

If a player has to leave the game before its conclusion, the coach of the player shall notify the opposing coach and game official of the player's departure and no minimum playing time is required.

2.6.1.6 Disciplinary Reasons

In the event a player exhibits inappropriate behavior or poor sportsmanship during a game or a practice, the coach will have the option of disciplining that player by limiting playing time. Reducing or eliminating playing time must be done consistently under this exception. Players are not to be treated differently based on their ability.

Whenever playing time is limited for disciplinary reasons, the coach must:

Notify the player of the reason he/she is being disciplined and the specific consequences.

Herndon Optimist NFL Flag Football (HONFL) League Rules, Procedures, Guidelines, and Policies

Notify the player's parent(s)/guardian(s) of the reason for the discipline and the specific consequences.

Notify the opposing coach and game official that playing time is being withheld from a player due to inappropriate behavior.

Notify the League Commissioner of the reason for the discipline at least twenty-four (24) hours prior to a game.

2.6.1.7 Five Player Roster

Teams with only five players on their roster may start a game with four players. This will not result in a forfeit and the game will be counted towards the official record. The opposing team will play according to the HONFL rules.

2.6.2 Playing Time Rule Violations

The following are the penalties for playing time rule violations:

First violation: If the team is on offense, there will be a 15 yard penalty and loss of down. If the team is on defense, there will be a 15 yard penalty and the offensive team will get an automatic first down.

Second violation: Team will forfeit the game

If there are repeated violations by a team during the season, additional disciplinary action may be taken against the Head or Assistant Coach including, but not limited to, a temporary or permanent suspension from coaching duties.

2.7 Player Injuries

The following HONFL League Rules are in addition to the NFL Flag Rules.

All player injuries that result in the player being removed for the remainder of a game or missing the team's next regular practice as a result of a game or practice injury must be reported. Coaches and game officials are responsible for reporting the injury through their appropriate chains (League Commissioner and Director of Youth Game Officials) so that the League Commissioner may maintain awareness of the incident and the well being of the player.

Herndon Optimist NFL Flag Football (HONFL) League Rules, Procedures, Guidelines, and Policies

2.7.1 Concussions

Any player that is asked to leave the game due to signs of a concussion will not be permitted to return that day. We would ask that parents of the player understand this is for the safety of our youth and that the player be appropriately evaluated prior to practicing or playing in the next game.

2.7.2 Blood

If a player sustains an injury during the game that results in blood exposure to other players, the player must immediately leave the game and be attended to by a team coach or parent. Before being allowed to return to the game, all bleeding must have stopped, all blood on skin must be removed with an antiseptic wipe, and if the player's jersey/shorts are blood-stained, the player must switch into an alternate jersey/shorts or a plain white t-shirt if an alternate jersey is not available.

3.0 Procedures

3.1 League and Team Management

The activities expected to be performed by Coaches and the League Board are listed in the HONFL Activities Checklist. Repeated failure to perform assigned duties may result in removal from the position by the League Commissioner.

3.2 Tie-Breaking

Rank in the division standings will not be based on points scored. When two teams are tied in the standings, the following procedures will be used to determine final division standings and seeding for post season tournament play:

Regular season head-to-head results will be used as the tiebreaker

If the two tied teams split their regular season games or did not play each other, the tie will be broken by a coin flip conducted by the League Commissioner.

3.3 Protests

Protests of games should be avoided. Protests can only be made if the opposing team is suspected of a rule violation. Protests involving judgment calls by the game officials will not be recognized. The coach that lodges the protest must submit to the League Commissioner in writing of the reasons for the protest within twenty-four (24) hours of the game

Herndon Optimist NFL Flag Football (HONFL) League Rules, Procedures, Guidelines, and Policies

ending. The League Commissioner will review and determine the resolution of protests.

4.0 Guidelines and Policies

The HONFL League will follow all policies and procedures approved and implemented by the Optimist Club of Herndon Board of Directors. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Personally Identifiable Information (PII) Handling and Disclosure
- Youth Programs Volunteer Background Checks
- Anti-Harassment and Discrimination
- Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect