

FLAG FOOTBALL Coaching Handbook

Missouri Valley Family YMCA



INTRODUCTION

Thank you for volunteering as a Flag Football coach at the Y!

Volunteer coaches are the backbone of the Missouri Valley Family YMCA, playing a crucial role in developing young athletes. As a coach, you do more than teach football fundamentals—you help instill teamwork, discipline, and a passion for the game.

Coaching goes beyond attending practices and games. It's about being a mentor, a role model, and a positive influence in the lives of your players. We know that many youth football coaches are parents stepping up to lead their child's team, and we appreciate your dedication. That's why we are committed to making your coaching experience as smooth and enjoyable as possible.

This manual is designed to help first-time coaches build confidence by covering the rules, fundamental techniques, and effective drills. It provides the essential tools you need to create a fun, safe, and educational experience for your team.

Your time, effort, and commitment make a lasting impact on our young athletes and our YMCA community. We are grateful for your involvement—thank you for making a difference!

Sincerely,

Cole Lafferty

YMCA Sports Director

SNAPPING THE FOOTBALL

Since every play in youth flag football starts with a snap of the ball to the quarterback, it is extremely important to teach proper snapping fundamentals. It is important to practice this skill to have a successful offense.

Under-Center Snap

- Start in a 2-point stance with feet shoulder-width apart, knees bent, elbows resting on knees, and head up.
- Reach the throwing hand (or both hands) out to the football. Grip the football with the first knuckle of the thumb placed in-between the white line and the first lace. The palm of the hand should rest on the outside of the ball with the four fingers spread across the back.
- Each end of the football is pointing towards an end zone. The front of the football is slightly elevated with the back of the football on the ground. Keep head lifted.
- On the quarterback's signal, the ball is snapped by turning the hand inward so the ends are pointing to the sidelines. The center pushes it into the hands of the quarterback.
- The laces should be parallel to the ground on the top of the ball.
- The ball is released and the called play is ran.

The traditional snap can be difficult for younger players with small hands even when using 2 hands. Players may use the side snap. In a side snap the center stands perpendicular to the line of scrimmage and snaps the ball off to the side.

Shotgun Snap

- Start in a 2-point stance with feet shoulder-width apart, knees bent, elbows resting on knees, and head up.
- Reach the throwing hand (or both hands) out to the football. Grip the football with the first knuckle of the thumb placed in-between the white line and the first lace. The palm of the hand should rest on the outside of the ball with the four fingers spread across the back.
- Each end of the football is pointing towards an end zone. The front of the football is slightly elevated with the back of the football on the ground. Keep head lifted.
- On the quarterback's signal, the ball is snapped by flicking the wrist as the ball leaves the hand.

RUNNING THE FOOTBALL

For some young players, just running with the football can be a challenge. Although the size of the football is age-appropriate, it still can be large and tough for some kids to handle. Inexperienced players need to be shown the proper way to take a hand-off from the Quarterback, and how to properly grip and run with the football.

The Quarterback/Running Back Exchange

For a flawless exchange between the quarterback and the running back the Running Back should make a "pocket" with their arms and hands to properly accept the football from the QB.

Top Half of the "Pocket"

- Inside Elbow - even with the shoulders
- Forearm - horizontal with the ground
- Inside Hand - palm down, ready to accept the point of the ball

Bottom Half of the "Pocket"

- Outside Elbow - straight down from the shoulder
- Forearm - horizontal across the midsection
- Outside Hand - slightly bent with the palm up, ready to accept the other end of the ball
- Fingers - pointing toward the quarterback

Receiving the Ball

- Hands - both hands instantly secure the ball upon contact
- Eyes - focused on where the play is designed to go

How to Properly Grip and Carry the Football While Running

- Place the tip of the index finger directly over the tip of the ball
- The rest of the hand grasps as much of the surface of the football as possible.
- The remaining surface of the ball is then supported by the inside of the wrist and forearm.
- The tips of the fingers down to the middle of the forearm sustain the football during the initial grasp.
- Keep the ball close and carry it by your side.
- Have a firm grip.

THROWING THE FOOTBALL

Throwing a football can be a bit different from throwing other types of balls. The football is shaped different and requires a certain grip and throwing motion. You want to learn to throw the ball in a tight spiral so that it will cut through the wind and fly straight and true to your target.

The Grip

The most important step is to use a proper grip. Find a grip that works for your player and keep it consistent. Since they have smaller hands, their grips may vary.

- The hand should be on one end of the football. Not in the middle. The thumb and index finger will form a "C" around the end, in front of the laces. The tips of the next 2 fingers should be on the first 2 laces. The pinky should be somewhere below the laces spread out from the ring finger.
- The ball should be gripped with the fingers, not the palm of the hand. There should be space between the palm of the hand and the ball.

The Stance

It is important to have good balance when throwing the football. Throwing off balance can lead to inaccuracy and interceptions.

- Balance with feet spread a little wider than shoulder-width and weight on the balls of the feet.
- One foot (opposite of the throwing arm) should be in front of the other. That same shoulder should point toward the target.
- Weight should be on the back foot and during the throw the weight will transfer to the front foot. This transfer of weight provides power and accuracy.

Holding the Ball

- Before the throw the ball should be in both hands.
- The ball should be held up high, about shoulder level.

Throwing Motion

- Drop the other hand and bring the throwing arm back.
- The elbow should be bent and pointing at the target ("L" shaped) with the ball by the ear.
- Throw the ball with a half-circle motion, going over the top, not to the side. Turn your back shoulder towards the target as the ball is thrown.
- "Step into the throw" by stepping forward and transferring the weight from the back foot to the front foot.
- Release the ball when the elbow is fully extended.

Follow Through

- Continue the follow through after releasing the ball.
- Snap the wrist towards the target and then to the ground. The thumb should point to the ground and the palm faces out.
- The empty hand should then head toward the non-dominant hip.

- The body should continue to follow through as well with the far shoulder pointing at the target and the back foot lifting off the ground and stepping towards the target.

Spin

- The last part of the hand to touch the ball is the index finger, resulting in a spiral throw.
- A spiral spin provides accuracy, distance, speed, and is easier for the receiver to catch.

Drop Backs

Learning how to drop back properly is important. Being further back from the line of scrimmage creates additional space between the quarterback and defensive rushers.

- As the snap is received, turn sideways in the direction of the throwing arm.
- The first step is a reach step. A powerful, quick, deep step with the back foot.
- The middle step(s) are (a) crossover step(s).
- The last step is the plant step. It is a small reach step. As the plant step takes place, the front shoulder should dip down slightly to maintain balance.
- The drop back should be quick, and the eyes should remain downfield for open receivers.

RECEIVING THE FOOTBALL

The proper technique for catching a football needs to be taught. Most kids do not know how to catch a football properly.

Watch the Ball

- Concentration and watch the ball all the way to the hands.
- Don't try to run or worry about the defense until the ball is in the hands and tucked away.

Catch With Your Hands

- Catch the ball with the hands, not with the body.
- Snatch the ball out of the air.
- The ball is likely to bounce off the body if the body is used to catch.

Use Both Hands

- Always use 2 hands to catch the ball. If a defender tries to knock a ball free, the receiver is more likely to hold on to it with 2 hands.

How to place your hands with the ball above your waist

- Position the hands so that the thumbs and index fingers are touching and form a triangle.
- The rest of the hands and fingers should be spread out with the fingers up.

How to place your hands with the ball below your waist

- Position the hands with the fingers down and pinkies touching.

Soft Hands

- Keep hands soft and fingers flexible, like a cushion. Bring in the ball so that it doesn't just bounce off the hands.
- Sometimes the ball is coming in at a great velocity. If hands and fingers are stiff, the ball will bounce off.

Tuck the Ball

- Once the ball has been caught, tuck it away.
- Catch the ball, secure it, and run!

RUNNING ROUTES

Running good pass routes will go a long way toward helping your team move the ball. A good route has four main parts: start, stem, break, and burst. Teaching the importance of everyone running his/her assigned route will be a challenge. This is a good time to explain and teach the importance of teamwork. Remember to be patient with the players, especially the younger ones.

Start

- A good route begins with a good stance and start. It's important to gain as much ground as you can as quickly as possible.

Stem

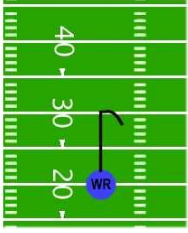
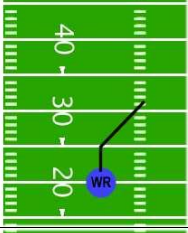
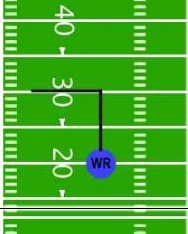
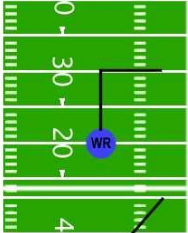
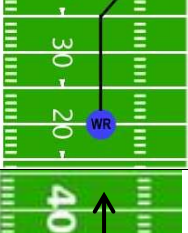
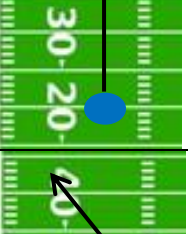
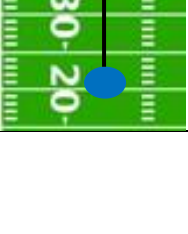
- The receiver forces the defensive back up the field. Run toward the outside shoulder of the defender in an attempt to get him to turn his hips away from the line of scrimmage.

Break

- The receiver transitions from the stem to the burst by making a direction-changing cut. In order to get in and out of a break quickly, stay low and maintain proper balance by keeping your shoulders directly over your feet.

Burst

- The receiver comes out of the break and attempts to create additional separation from the defender. Different routes require different bursts. A curl requires the receiver to come off the break with 2 steps back to the quarterback and then stop. A post requires a full speed, continued burst after the break.

Hook or Hitch Route		In the hook or hitch route the receiver runs up the field a certain distance and then quickly stops and turns back to the quarterback to catch the ball. The receiver makes a slight hook pattern moving back in the direction of the quarterback. The hitch generally refers to a short route of around 5 yards while the hook is a longer route of 10 to 12 yards.
Slant Route		In the slant route the receiver goes a short distance down the field and then quickly cuts at a 45 degree angle across the middle of the field. This is a great route against blitz defenses or where a quick pass is needed.
Out Route		An out route is where the receiver runs straight down the field for a certain distance and then runs "out" directly towards the sideline. A normal out will go for 10-15 yards down field before turning toward the sidelines. A "quick" out is a short out of around 5 yards.
In or Dig Route		The In route or dig route is similar to the out, but where the receiver cuts at a 90 degree angle to the middle of the field.
Post Route		Post routes are used for long pass plays. In a post route the receiver runs 10 to 15 yards straight downfield and then cuts in at an angle toward the goal posts.
Go Route		A go route is usually a straight route up the field where the receiver uses their speed to pass the cornerback. Sometimes they may make an earlier move as if to run an out or in route to fake out the defender. Then they put on a burst of speed and run a go route.
Corner or Flag Route		Similar to the post route, the flag route is usually run on longer plays. In the flag route the receiver runs 10-15 yards up the field and then turns toward the pylon of the corner of the end zone.

DEFENSE/FLAG PULLING

The obvious difference between flag football and regulation football is that in flag football the defense must grab the flag of the player with the ball instead of tackling the player. Believe it or not, it is often more difficult to grab and pull a flag than it is to tackle a player. Your team must learn the best way to grab an opponent's flag. You may find that most of your players will want to lunge at one of the opponent's flag with one hand. While this will occasionally work, a better technique is for the player to attempt to position themselves in front of the ball carrier, giving the defensive player a great opportunity to pull either flag.

Breaking Down

The best way to make a flag pull is to be in position to do so. Breaking down is a way of moving that brings the defender under control and gives him the best chance of having a successful flag pull.

- Shorten steps. Use fast, choppy steps.
- Be balanced and in control of the body. Be ready for the ball carrier to make a move.
- Stay low, with arms out slightly for balance and shoulders above the feet.
- Watch the player's belly, and move toward the target (the flags).

Flag-Pull

Pulling flags is a skill that is developed only after ample practice, so go through these motions several times.

- Sprint to the ball carrier.
- As you approach the ball carrier, come to a low, balanced defensive position and shorten your strides into short, choppy steps (break down), getting ready for the ball carrier to move in any direction.
- Reach for the top of the flag. Firmly grab the flag and pull hard.

Coverage

In order to play effective defense, all players must learn how to back pedal. Backpedaling is necessary to keep a defender in position to make a play on the receiver while maintaining a cushion so they are not beat on a deep pass.

- Begin in a good defensive stance.
- Push backward off the front step and step with the back foot.
- Shoulder should be parallel to the line of scrimmage.
- When the receiver gets within 3 yards, the defensive back should turn to run with the receiver.