

# Diocese of Cleveland CYO

## Rookie Tackle Football

*Giving the Very Best of Yourself!*

Rules  
2025



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The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Football Rules apply in this league with the exceptions contained within. CYO game rules may not be altered by mutual consent of the coaches. Only the CYO office may authorize changes.

The purpose of this program is to serve as a bridge between flag football and 11-player tackle football. This program will take a developmental approach to the game of football by focusing on participation, safe blocking and tackling techniques, skill development, position placement, and improving the experience for younger players.

### **SECTION 1 - OFFICIAL TEAM**

- A. Defined as an individual or group of children from one or more Members listed on the team roster that meet the eligibility rules and are approved by the member athletic director, Parish Administrator, and CYO Office.
- B. A CYO Team refusing to continue playing a scheduled game for any reason without the consent of the game official or CYO representative may be subject to penalties outlined in Bylaw 10. This also applies to CYO Sanctioned Events.
- C. 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Division
  - 1. An official 7-man Rookie Tackle football team will consist of a minimum of 7 boys or girls.
  - 2. There is a minimum roster size of 11 athletes. There is a maximum number of 18 unless all are from the same member.
  - 3. Fourth (4) graders are not eligible to play Rookie Tackle.
- D. 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Division
  - 1. An official 8-man Rookie Tackle football team will consist of a minimum of 8 boys or girls.
  - 2. There minimum roster size of 12 athletes. There is a maximum number of 18 unless all are from the same member.
- E. A partial roster or combined roster cannot be entered into any tournament or sanctioned event.

### **SECTION 2 - OFFICIALS**

- A. Officials that are certified and registered with the Diocese of Cleveland CYO will be assigned to each game.
- B. Officials have the power to warn or disqualify from the competition anyone who commits acts which intend to influence their decisions.
- C. Officials have the authority to call or suspend a game if conditions warrant.
- D. The following officials will be assigned to each regular season game and sanctioned events: Two (2) officials will be assigned to Rookie Tackle 5<sup>th</sup> grade football games. Three officials for 6<sup>th</sup> grade games.
- E. The head coach and the team captain are the only persons that should speak to the officials before, during, or after the game.

### **SECTION 3 - EQUIPMENT & UNIFORMS**

- A. Game Ball:
  - 1. All grades will use a junior size ball.
  - 2. Teams are permitted to use either a composite or leather ball.
- B. Electronic Devices:
  - 1. Walkie-talkies, cell phones, or any other electronic communication systems are not permitted within the competition area.
  - 2. Droids are not permitted.
  - 3. Teams are permitted to only videotape their games.
    - a. Videotaping is only permitted from areas approved by the facility but is never permitted from within the competition area, team bench area or other unapproved areas.
    - b. Individuals videotaping or photographers must be positioned at least two yards from the sideline or end zone.
    - c. Coaches, Fans, etc. are not permitted to videotape an opponent's game or practice.
- C. All athletes are required to wear member issued uniforms.
- D. The numbers on the jersey are MANDATORY. A number shall be printed on the front and back of each jersey. The number on the back of the jersey shall be at least 10 inches in height, while the number on the front of the jersey shall be at least 8 inches in height. The bars or strokes should be approximately 1-1/2 inches wide.

- E. Because of the “all players, all positions, all skills philosophy, there are no restrictions on jersey numbers or player positions.
- F. The NFHS jersey number requirements by position and the requirement of the visiting team to wear a white jersey do not apply to CYO competitions.
- G. All players must have the CYO Emblem on their uniform either sewn or stenciled.
- H. All participants must be properly equipped and fitted by the member with the following items:
  - 1. Helmets that are NOCSAE certified. All helmets must have the certified imprint and special warning stickers related to injuries. At least a four snap chin strap shall be required to secure the helmet.
  - 2. Shoulder pads.
  - 3. Football pants with pads for the hips, tailbone, thighs, and knees.
- I. A maximum of 3/4 inch rubber or plastic cleats are permitted. Cleats may screw-on or be molded into the shoe. Metal cleats are prohibited.
- J. A mouthpiece must be secure in the player’s mouth during the game. If a mouthpiece is not designed by an orthodontist designed, it must be attached to the face-guard and be of any readily visible color. A mouthpiece cannot be white or clear in color.
- K. Chains, earrings, other jewelry, glitter, face paint, or other inappropriate items may not be worn during the game. **A ½” x 1” strip of black eye black is the only legal use of face paint.**
- L. An American flag and or a commemorative/memorial patch not to exceed 2 by 3 inches and with the approval of the CYO Administration may be worn on each of the uniform apparel provided neither the flag nor patch interferes with the visibility of the player’s number.

#### **SECTION 4 - PRE-CONTEST COACHES RESPONSIBILITIES**

- A. All head and assistant coaches must be CYO certified and **re-certified every season to have access to the sideline.**
- B. CYO Credentials are to be always worn and visible.
  - 1. Credentials cannot be given to another coach at any time.
  - 2. Coaches who give their credentials to another coach, even for one game, will have their coaching privileges revoked for one year.
  - 3. If a coach has lost or forgotten their credential, they must inform the Site Director and show proof of certification with a photo ID and either the photo of the credential or the coach’s name on the certification list.
- C. Coaches are responsible for the supervision of their team before, during, and after the game.
- D. At each game and practice, coaches are to have in their possession: an official team roster, a copy of each athlete’s Pre-participation Form and Emergency Medical Authorization Form and a first aid kit.
- E. A pre-game conference will be held between the officials, coaches, and captains.
- F. Bench personnel are limited to:
  - 1. Players listed on the eligibility roster, two (2) water personnel under the age of 16 and four (4) non-players (coaches).
  - 2. Non-players 16 years of age or older must be CYO certified.
  - 3. Non-players under the age of 9 are not allowed in the bench area.
- G. Chains and Down Marker Crews:
  - 1. The 3 personnel must be at least a high school senior or older. The crew must report to the game officials at least ten (10) minutes before the start of the game.
  - 2. If the team assigns individuals to serve in this capacity, the head coach is responsible for the actions, verbal or otherwise, of the people assigned.
  - 3. The visiting team will provide the chain and down marker crew and will be positioned on the visiting sideline.

#### **SECTION 5 - PARTICIPATION**

- A. Each athlete must be treated with dignity regardless of their ability.
- B. A player on a CYO team may not participate on any other football team during the CYO season. For purposes of defining eligibility, a player may not be on another team from the published CYO roster due date and the completion of the team’s final game.

- C. Each member of the team must play a minimum of one quarter per half.
- D. All players should have at least one offensive and defensive line position as well as one offensive and defensive backfield position to play each game.
- E. There must be a minimum of 2-3 quarterbacks per team. **Each quarterback** plays a balanced number of plays. **Quarterbacks cannot run up the middle from a direct snap.**
- F. Guest Player Rule: Guest Players may be moved from the member's other CYO Rookie Tackle football team(s) to fill the positions at the start of a game under the following restrictions:
  - 1. If a 7-man or 8-man Rookie Tackle football team has fewer than 12 athletes at a game.
  - 2. The athlete meets the age/grade restrictions of the squad the athlete will assist.
  - 3. The guest player is reported by means of the button on the Coaches Information page: [Guest Player Link](#)
  - 4. The same individual may be moved as a guest player for no more than two (2) games during the season.
  - 3. The athlete complies with the number of games per day competition limits as outlined in Section 6.
  - 4. Guest players cannot be used for sanctioned events or CYO championship competitions.

## **SECTION 6 - GAME & TIME LIMITATION**

- A. No team or player is permitted to play more than 10 games in a season.
- B. No team or player may play more than 1 game in a day.
- C. No team or player may play more than 2 games per weekend.
- D. Events on Sunday cannot begin until 1:00 PM.
- E. Events cannot start after 8:00 PM.
- F. Practice sessions must be completed by 9:00 PM.

## **SECTION 7 - LIGHTNING & INCLEMENT WEATHER**

- A. The OHSA lightning & inclement weather policy is in effect.
- B. When thunder is heard or a lightning bolt is seen at a practice or competition, the teams must suspend play and take shelter immediately. Once play has been suspended, a period of at least 30 minutes after the last thunder heard or lightning flash is witnessed must be honored prior to resuming play/practice.
- C. Contest or CYO officials assume authority for competitions when they arrive on the field. When the officials recognize inclement weather, they are bound to suspend the game. Coaches and member athletic directors are responsible for applying this policy at practice.
- D. Announcements related to the status of competitions will be posted on the main page of the schedule website or telephone announcement lines and media as needed.
- E. Contests that are suspended because of inclement weather and cannot be resumed with-in a reasonable time at the same site will be cancelled, unless deemed necessary to reschedule by the CYO Administration.
- F. **Weather Statement**
  - 1. Weather conditions are continuously monitored by CYO staff and weather professionals.
  - 2. Weather delays or cancelation decisions will be made ONLY BY CYO STAFF and communicated promptly.
  - 3. Official contest delays or cancellations re weather is available on the scheduling page of the CYO website.
  - 4. When lightning is detected within a 10-mile radius, all outdoor activities will be suspended immediately.
  - 5. When heat index thresholds become too high, outdoor events may be delayed or canceled.
  - 6. Events may be delayed, relocated, or rescheduled due to field or facility conditions.

## **SECTION 8 - PRACTICE AND COACHING GUIDELINE**

- A. Practice or any organized team conditioning cannot start prior to the CYO published first day of practice.
- B. Practice sessions shall be limited to one (1) session per day not to exceed two (2) hours in duration.
- C. Uniforms and equipment may be distributed three (3) weeks prior to the official first day of practice. **No conditioning or coaching instructions may take place until approval of CYO Administration.**
- D. All athletes must participate in five days of physical acclimation prior to any physical contact. Athletes reporting late must have at least five days of physical acclimation prior to any physical contact. This rule applies to all teams & participants.
  - 1. Days 1 & 2 – No Pads. Shorts, helmets, and shoes can be worn, no physical contact.
  - 2. Days 3 & 4 – Shoulder pads may be added, but no contact is permitted.

3. Day 5 – Full equipment may be worn, but contact is prohibited.
  4. Athletes must complete 2 days of **no pads**; shorts, helmets, shoes can be worn, but no physical contact before moving onto adding shoulder pads. Once shoulder pads are added, no contact is permitted. After at least 2 days of shoulder pads and no contact, full equipment may be worn but contact is prohibited.
- E. Limited Contact during Practice:
1. No intentional head-to-head contact is permitted during practice.
    - a. Full speed head-on-blocking or tackling drills in which the players line up more than three (3) yards apart are prohibited.
    - b. Having two (2) linemen in stances immediately across from each other is permitted.
    - c. Having full speed drills where the players approach each other at an angle, but not straight ahead into each other is permitted.
  2. The amount of contact at each practice cannot exceed 1/3 of the daily practice time.
- F. Scrimmages:
1. Three (3) pre-season scrimmages are permitted.
  2. Officials may be used during scrimmages provided both sets of coaches remain on the field. No score or time limit will be kept. Use of officials is the decision and cost of the teams involved.

## SECTION 9 - COMPETITION RULES

- A. Field Size:
1. **5<sup>th</sup> Grade:** 40 yards in length and 30 yards in width.
  2. **6<sup>th</sup> Grade:** Regulation field.
- B. Clock:
1. The length of the four (4) quarters shall be ten (10) minutes running clock, with a one-minute rest period between quarters.
  2. Half time will be eight (8) minutes in length.
  3. The game clock will stop for change of possession, injury, after a touchdown, or at the official's discretion.
  4. The clock does not run during extra point attempts.
- C. Time Outs:
1. Each team will be allowed three (3) sixty (60) second time-outs per half of a game.
  2. Unused time-outs do not carry over to the second half.
- D. Scoring:
1. Touchdown will award 6 points
  2. PAT-Run/Pass will award 1 point from the 3 yard line
  3. PAT-Run/Pass will award 2 points from the 5 yard line
  4. **There are no extra points by a kick. All PATs are attempted through a run or pass try**
  5. Changing PAT type
    - a. Once a decision on the type of PAT to attempt has been made, in order to make a change, a timeout must be called.
    - b. The decision of PAT type can be changed after a penalty.
- E. Overtime: If at the end of regulation, the score is tied, the game will result in a tie. There is no overtime at these grade levels.
- F. Placement of the ball:
1. **5<sup>th</sup> Grade:**
    - a. Each possession starts with the ball on the 40-yard line, regardless of whether there is a score, turnover, or turnover on downs. **There are no safeties.**
    - b. After each play, the ball is spotted in the middle of the field. **Hash marks are not used.**
    - c. There are no field goals or extra-point kicks.
  2. **6<sup>th</sup> Grade:**
    - a. There are no kickoffs. The game begins and restarts after a score with the ball on the 30-yard line.
    - b. After each play, the ball is spotted in the middle of the field. **Hash marks are not used.**
    - c. After a Touchback the ball will be put in play on the 30-yard line.



- d. After a safety the ball will be put in play at the 50-yard line.
- e. After a change of possession, the ball is placed on the 30-yard line.
- G. Kicking: Special teams are **NOT** permitted. No punting **or field goals**.
- H. Coach on the field
  - 1. 5<sup>th</sup> Grade - One coach is allowed on the field during play.
  - 2. 6<sup>th</sup> Grade - No coach is allowed on the field during play.

## SECTION 10 - MERCY RULE

### A. 5<sup>th</sup> Grade

There is no Mercy Rule as outlined at other levels. The goal of this division is skill development and overall positive experience. In the event of a lopsided game, the winning team is expected to conduct themselves in a manner that the game officials and CYO administration feel show respect and dignity towards its opponent. No passing, basic handoffs only.

### B. 6<sup>th</sup> Grade

- 1. When a team reaches an 18-point spread differential over their opponents, the team is expected to conduct itself in a manner that the game officials and CYO administration feel show respect and dignity towards its opponent.
- 2. THE MERCY RULE IS IN EFFECT ANY TIME IN THE SECOND HALF.
- 3. The leading team must give up the ball on any 4<sup>th</sup> down. The ball is given over to the other team and placed at the opponent 30-yard line.
- 4. The team with the 18+ point lead cannot throw the ball, however they may run the ball, but must run between the tackles.
- 5. The Mercy Rule cannot be waived for playoffs, championship games or sanctioned events.
- 6. Penalty for Violation of the Mercy Rule
  - a. First Offense - Warning
  - b. Second Offense - Unsportsmanlike conduct penalty on the head coach.
  - c. Third Offense - Unsportsmanlike conduct penalty and ejection of the head coach.
  - d. Fourth Offense - Forfeit Loss and head coach removed for the remainder of the season.

## SECTION 11 - SUPPLEMENTAL RULES

### A. Turnovers:

- 1. Interception:
  - a. 5<sup>th</sup> Grade - The play is blown dead immediately. Defensive team will begin set of downs on offense from 40-yard line.
  - b. 6<sup>th</sup> Grade - The interceptor may return the ball on an interception. **The ball will be placed where the ball is returned.**
- 2. Fumble:
  - a. **5<sup>th</sup> Grade-Fumble past the line of scrimmage – Maybe recovered by either team but not advanced.**
  - b. **6<sup>th</sup> Grade- Fumbles caused by the defense may be recovered and returned. Fumbles past the line of scrimmage are live balls for both teams.**
  - c. Fumble behind the line of scrimmage - Loss of down.
  - d. Fumbled snaps are dead - the next down will start from the original Line of Scrimmage.

### B. Penalties:

- 1. Targeting: No player shall target and make forcible contact to the head or neck area of a defenseless opponent with the helmet, forearm, hand, fist, elbow or shoulder. Penalty: Ejection & suspension.
- 2. **5<sup>th</sup> Grade:**
  - a. Because of limited field size, all 15-yard penalties are enforced as 10-yard penalties.
  - b. No penalty on offense can take the ball beyond the 40-yard line. Penalties when the Line of Scrimmage is inside the 40, but not on the 40, will be enforced back to 40.
  - c. Penalties on the offense that are called and accepted with the line of scrimmage on or behind the 40-yard line result in a loss of down.
- 3. **6<sup>th</sup> Grade:** Penalties will be enforced per regulation tackle football rules.

4. All personal foul penalties require an immediate substitution from the field for a minimum of one play to allow coaches to address misconduct and promote good sportsmanship. This is referred to as a 'cooling off period.'
- C. Offensive adjustments
1. Each play must include three offensive linemen - 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 regardless of the numbers on their jerseys. Player rotations may result in traditional non-lineman numbers at these positions for the purpose of fundamental skills development.
  2. Guards are required to play from a two-point stance. There are NO three-point stances.
  3. The center may use one or two hands to snap the ball.
  4. The distance between the guard and center may not exceed three feet (1 yard), but may be closer.
  5. Offensive Linemen
    - a. The three offensive linemen must identify themselves on each play by raising their hands as they break the huddle and approach the line of scrimmage.
    - b. Once identified as an offensive lineman, players may not shift to another position.
  6. The quarterback-center exchange may be direct, pistol or shotgun.
  7. Quarterback sneaks are prohibited in all situations because the defense is not allowed to have players aligned over the center or guard A gap. A QB must run outside the guards if they do not hand off the ball or if QB drops back and is unable to find a receiver or forced out of the pocket.
  8. At least two different quarterbacks must be used each half; position time as quarterback must be balanced.
  9. Offensive Line
    - a. **5<sup>th</sup> Grade**
      - i. The offense must have four players on the line of scrimmage. No more, no less. The fourth player can be a tight end or split end.
      - ii. The four offensive players who are not playing guard or center may be deployed in positions at the coach's discretion if one is on the line of scrimmage.
    - b. **6<sup>th</sup> Grade**
      - i. The offense must have five players on the line of scrimmage. No more, no less. The fourth and 5<sup>th</sup> players can be a tight end, split ends or a combination of the two. Only the two end players on the line of scrimmage are eligible for first touching of a pass.
      - ii. There are no unbalanced lines. The split ends/tight ends must be on the opposite sides of the center.
      - iii. The five offensive players who are not playing guard or center may be deployed in positions at the coach's discretion as long as two on the line of scrimmage.
  10. **No trips formation is allowed.** For Rookie Tackle, "trips" is defined as any three players outside the guard-to-guard box.
  11. Motion is allowed by a backfield player if it does not create a trips formation.
  12. All blocks below the waist are illegal.
- D. Blocking
1. Contact blocking is allowed between the shoulders and waist only (a.k.a. "inside the frame").
  2. All blocking outside the notional or traditional 'free blocking zone' must INITIATE with open hands and not the elbows/shoulders (i.e. players cannot begin a block with their shoulders). The 'free blocking zone' is a rectangular area extending four yards on either side of where the ball is snapped and three yards on either side of scrimmage.
  3. Blockers must be on their feet before, during and after contact is made with their opponents.
  4. All blocks below the waist, in any situation, are illegal.
  5. No contact of any kind is allowed above the shoulders of an opponent.
  6. Illegal blocks include:
    - a. Leading with the shoulder outside the 'free blocking zone'
    - b. Low/chop/cut blocks: An attempt by a player to block an opponent at the thigh level or lower.



- c. Crack-back block: A blind-side block on a player by an opponent who starts downfield and then cuts back toward the original spot of the ball to make contact.
  - d. Blind-side block: Engaging an opponent who does not see the blocker approaching with anything other than fully extended arms and open palms. Any block against an opponent other than the runner, who does not see the blocker approaching unless it is initiated with open hands.
  - e. Clipping: A player hitting an opponent from behind.
  - f. Tripping: A player using their leg or foot to stop an opponent's forward motion.
  - g. Hook or hug block: A player gaining advantage of an opponent by turning or detaining the opponent by illegally tackling or using arms around the body, waist, shoulders or arms.
  - h. Rolling blocks: A player on the ground attempting to block or engage an opponent by moving or turning over and over on an axis.
  - i. Dive blocks: A player leaving their feet to engage an opponent.
  - j. Making contact with an opponent while swinging or flipping hands, arms or elbows.
  - k. Slapping, punching, or swinging at an opponent with hands, arms or elbows.
  - l. Grabbing or holding an opponent's jersey while blocking.
  - m. Interlocking of blocker's fingers or hands.
  - n. Laying on a downed defender
7. Swim moves (a player using a maneuver like a freestyle swimming stroke to get past an opponent) are legal. However, if the swim moves results in contact with an opponent above the shoulder (neck, head, or face) it is illegal.
8. Downfield blocking for the ball carrier is allowed.
9. Blocking downfield while the ball is in the air is pass interference except if the pass is behind the line of scrimmage.
10. Two-on-one blocking is permitted as long as both blockers are engaging the opponent above the waist.
11. If a player turns to expose their back, it is not an illegal block if their opponent maintains contact with the player from the initial block.

#### E. Defensive Adjustments

- 1. The defense must have a defensive lineman over each guard and may cover any tight or split end on the line of scrimmage.
- 2. Defensive linemen must be in a two-point stance.
- 3. Defensive linemen over the guards must be aligned in a head up or outside shade position.
- 4. Players in an outside shade must always have one foot aligned inside the stance of the opposing guards.
- 5. The Defensive linemen's first movement is to play the outside gap, cannot stunt into the "A" gap.
- 6. The defense must have one player at least 10 yards from the ball.
- 7. All remaining players not on the line of scrimmage or at ten-yard-deep safety must be a minimum of five yards off the line of scrimmage.
  - a. Defenses that choose not to match the eligible receivers on the line of scrimmage may position those players on the second level if they are at least four yards from the line of scrimmage.
- 8. **NO blitzes are allowed.** Players on the line at the snap can penetrate upon the snap. Linebackers, safeties, and cornerbacks (both on the line and at depth) can flow to the ball naturally after the handoff is made, but predetermining penetration to a specific gap is illegal.
  - a. Coaches are encouraged to be creative with their formations but not use "the box" to delay defensive penetration. Moving the players back to 5 yards will eliminate the difficult interpretations of who and when a player can penetrate the line during a pass play. The players will be far enough off the line that we can let them flow naturally.
  - b. NOTE: 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.
  - c. The penalty for blitzing any player other than the defensive lineman will be a 15 yard penalty.
- 9. If the ball is inside of the 4-yard line, players may align on the goal line.
- 10. Hurry up offenses are NOT permitted, except for the 10-yard-deep player.

## SECTION 12 - CAUTION AND DISQUALIFICATION

- A. Teams are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that the game officials and CYO administration feel shows respect and dignity towards its opponent.
- B. Actions by athletes, coaches, parents, or fans that conflict with the behavior standards of the Diocese of Cleveland CYO may be assessed consequences as outlined in Bylaw 11, even when the persons involved were not ejected, asked to leave, removed or addressed at the time of the event.
- C. Athletes, coaches, parents, and fans who have been ejected, asked to leave, or removed by Officials or CYO personnel must depart immediately. If they refuse to leave the premises immediately, one week is added to their suspension. Their suspension begins the next day, with no option to appeal. There may be additional consequences and disciplinary actions for those individuals as stated below and in Bylaw 10.
- D. Anyone besides the coach or athlete on the team that enters the court or field of play is immediately suspended for one week and may be suspended for a longer time as determined by CYO Administration.
- E. Athletes who are ejected, asked to leave, or removed from an athletic event are automatically prohibited from attending any practices or CYO games for seven days including sanctioned events. They may not be on the premises of the next CYO scheduled game of any grade and may not attend or participate in any sanctioned event games during the seven-day period.
- F. Coaches who are ejected, asked to leave, or removed from an athletic event are automatically prohibited from attending any practice or CYO games for fourteen days including sanctioned events. They may not attend or be on the premises of the next two CYO scheduled games of any grade and may not attend any sanctioned event games during the fourteen-day period.
- G. Parents or fans who are ejected, asked to leave, or removed from an athletic event are automatically prohibited from attending any practices or CYO games for twenty-one days including sanctioned events. They may not attend or be on the premises of the next three CYO scheduled games of any grade and may not attend any sanctioned event games during the twenty-one-day period.
- H. Athletes, coaches, parents, or fans who are ejected, asked to leave, or removed from an event for a second time are not permitted to attend any competitions for the remainder of the season, including tournaments.
- I. Coaches ejected, asked to leave, or removed from an event for the second time in the same season will immediately surrender their coach's credential to the Site Director or Member Administration.



(July 2025)

**CYO inspires young people to know God, to love God and to serve God through athletics.**