

COACHING CALIFORNIA GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL FLAG FOOTBALL

California plays the NFHS rulebook with a few CIF changes. The field is 80 x 40 yards, and hash marks are required. Players wear 2 flags. There are no field goals. The clock stops at 2:00 in each half. Overtime starts at the 10. A lead over 27 in the 4th quarter keeps the clock running.

You don't need to know football. Most new coaches are parents who said yes. This guide gets you through your first practice and your first game.

WHO

California girls' high school coaches, varsity and JV.

AGES

Ages 14 to 18

LEVEL

California girls' high school (CIF)

FORMAT

7v7

YOUR FIRST PRACTICE: 60 MINUTES

0:00

10 min

Warm-up: Dynamic warm-up

Movement prep, then sideline leverage at full speed.

Drills: 5-10-5 shuttle, Sideline leverage

10:00

20 min

Skill stations: Individual position work

Passers work through their reads. Receivers work on sideline catches. Defenders work on man coverage and the rush.

Drills: Read 1, 2, 3, Sideline catch, Hip pocket man coverage, Rush lane

30:00

15 min

Team period: Team period

Teach new plays against a practice defense. The passer reads the defense and picks a side.

45:00

10 min

Scrimmage: Situational scrimmage

Red zone, fourth down and two-minute, scored and officiated like a game.

55:00

5 min

Cooldown: Cooldown

Recovery stretching and a short film or stats review.

Full plan with coaching points: breakawaydata.com/coaching-flag-football/practice-plans/high-school/



POSITIONS IN 7V7

Carry 10 to 14 players. Plan substitutions by series so every player gets real snaps on offense and defense.

OFFENSE

Center

Snaps, then becomes a receiver underneath. A center who catches well turns every blitz into a free completion.

Quarterback

Reads the coverage before the snap, makes the call at the line and gets the ball out on time.

Running back

Handoffs, pitches and the check-down route. On pass plays she reads the rush and leaks out to the open side.

Wide receivers (2)

The outside threats. Their depth and speed move the safeties and open the middle.

Slot receivers (2)

Line up inside the wideouts and run the quick, option and crossing routes that move the chains.

DEFENSE

Rusher or rushers

Pressure the passer within the rules of your ruleset. Even a rush that never gets there speeds up the throw.

Cornerbacks (2)

Match the wide receivers. Teach outside leverage first: push routes back toward help.

Linebackers (2)

Drop into the short middle, wall off crossing routes and pull the flag on runs and short catches.

Safeties (1 or 2)

Deep help. Read the quarterback's eyes, break on the throw and finish with a sure flag pull.

WHAT TO TEACH FIRST

1. Flag pulling

Pursuit angles and leverage: force the runner back inside to help, then pull. Track missed pulls every practice.

2. Route basics

Releases, depth and the break. Teach how each route changes against man and zone.

3. Snap and handoff

Shotgun snap to a target, mesh point on handoffs, and one run play that looks like your best pass play.

4. No-contact habits

Know exactly what your ruleset allows for blocking and contact, and coach to the line. Flag guarding and illegal contact are drive-killers.



10 RULES THAT CHANGE HOW YOU COACH (1 OF 3)

In our words, with the rulebook section to check. Your league can change some of these, so confirm before the first game.

1. An 80 x 40 yard field

The rule: NFHS Diagram 1: 240 by 120 feet, or 80 by 40 yards, between the goal lines. Add two 10-yard end zones. Tournaments or tight spaces may use a 120 by 120 foot field. That field has one line to gain, at midfield.

Plan short routes and quick drives. Tight spaces can use a smaller field with 1 first down line, so ask before a tournament.

CIF item 1, 1a, 1c



Watch how to stat it:
breakawaydata.com/breakaway-u/yardage-and-the-line-of-scrimmage

2. Snaps come from the hash marks

The rule: Required. They are 23 to 24 feet apart and 16 yards in from each sideline. Use pylons or cones when the field has no lines for them.

The ball can sit near one side of the field. Teach every play to the wide side and the short side.

CIF items 1, 1e, 13



Watch how to stat it:
breakawaydata.com/breakaway-u/yardage-and-the-line-of-scrimmage

3. Two flags, one on each hip

The rule: Each player wears 2 flags, a flag on each hip. The flags pull off the belt and contrast with the shorts. The belt sits snug at the waist. If it slides and blocks a flag pull, the official can end the play or call flag guarding. Flags can be up to 2.5 by 16 inches. The piece that clips each flag on must be a youth size.

Check belts before kickoff. A belt that slides over a flag can cost your team the play.

CIF item 11; CIF Point of Emphasis, Flags and Belts



Watch how to stat it:
breakawaydata.com/breakaway-u/record-a-flag-pull

4. The quarterback lines up 2 yards back

The rule: The player taking the snap lines up 2 or more yards back from the scrimmage line.

Every snap is a short toss back to her. Practice the center's snap to a target every day.

CIF Additional CIF Rules



Watch how to stat it:
breakawaydata.com/breakaway-u/record-a-rush



10 RULES THAT CHANGE HOW YOU COACH (2 OF 3)

5. No field goals

The rule: None. CIF has no field goals, no kickoffs and no place kicks, and no kicking tee.

No tee and no place kicks. Every try is a play, so drill your plays from the 3 and the 10.

CIF items 5, 7, 20



Watch how to stat it:
breakawaydata.com/breakaway-u/4th-down-punt

6. The clock stops at 2:00

The rule: From 2026-27 the clock stops at 2:00 in each half and restarts on the snap. It is not a timeout; in 2025-26 CIF used it as an optional extra timeout.

It stops in each half and starts again on the snap. Use that pause to call your end-of-half plays.

CIF 2026 Rule changes, 3-5-1



Watch how to stat it:
breakawaydata.com/breakaway-u/halftime-quarters-or-running-clock

7. Overtime starts at the 10

The rule: After a 3-minute break, there is a coin toss with no deferring. Each team starts at the other team's 10 and gets a try after its drive. If still tied, teams take turns with 1 try each from the 3. A team wins when it scores and the other does not. Each team gets 1 timeout for all of overtime. There is no game clock, and the defense can score.

Each team gets a drive from the other team's 10, then a try. Still tied? Teams trade tries from the 3. Practice both.

CIF item 14



Watch how to stat it:
breakawaydata.com/breakaway-u/record-an-extra-point-plus-1-or-plus-2-xp-attempt-after-td

8. A big lead keeps the clock running

The rule: A running clock once the margin passes 27 points in the fourth quarter, stopping only for team and officials' timeouts. The game is not ended.

Past 27 points in the 4th quarter, the clock only stops for timeouts. Use the time to play your whole roster.

CIF item 15



Watch how to stat it:
breakawaydata.com/breakaway-u/halftime-quarters-or-running-clock



10 RULES THAT CHANGE HOW YOU COACH (3 OF 3)

9. Tries from the 3 or the 10

The rule: Touchdown: 6. On the try, you pick 1 point from the 3 or 2 from the 10. Field goals (3) and kicked tries (1) count only where the state allows them. Then the other team starts at its 14. A team still behind may keep the ball instead. It gets 4th down at its own 20.

Go for 1 from the 3 or 2 from the 10. A team still behind after its try may keep the ball. Plan that call before the game.

From a real game:

Harbor Point scored first to lead 6-0. On the try, a runner carried it in for 1 point. In NFHS play, a 1-point try is snapped from the 3. A 2-point try is snapped from the 10.

NFHS 8-1; 8-3-1, 8-3-3, 8-3-9; 8-4-1



Watch how to stat it:
breakawaydata.com/breakaway-u/record-an-extra-point-plus-1-or-plus-2-xp-attempt-after-td

10. Flag guarding is 10 yards

The rule: Using the hands, arms or ball to stop a flag pull. It only counts if there is contact. Penalty: 10 yards. You keep the down.

It counts when hands, arms or the ball cause contact to stop a pull. Teach ball carriers to run with arms in.

NFHS 9-2-2b, c; Penalty summary; 10-1-6; Points of Emphasis



Watch how to stat it:
breakawaydata.com/breakaway-u/record-a-penalty



GAME-DAY CHECKLIST

- ☐ A flag belt and flags for every player, plus spares, in a color that does not match anyone's shorts.
- ☐ Mouth guards, water and a first aid kit.
- ☐ Game balls in the size your ruleset sets for this age.
- ☐ Your roster with jersey numbers, and who starts at quarterback and center.
- ☐ A short play sheet: three or four plays, one for the goal line, one for the try.
- ☐ A quick word with the other coach and the official on the rules you are playing.
- ☐ Someone to stat the game in the BreakAway app. Families follow along, and every player gets a stat card.
- ☐ Eligibility, uniforms and the belt style your association requires.
- ☐ Your plan for overtime and the mercy rule under your rules.

FOR YOUR LEVEL

The NFHS rules underneath

Everything CIF does not change follows the NFHS rulebook. The girls' high school guide covers the NFHS rules that change coaching most.

THE OFFICIAL RULEBOOK

2026 CIF By State Adoption (NFHS Rule 1, Table 1-7) (2026-27, posted on cifstate.org August 13, 2026)

https://www.cifstate.org/sports/flag_football/2026_CIF_By_State_Adoption_Rules.pdf

CIF Southern Section Blue Book, Article 210 Flag Football (2026-27)

<https://cifss.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/Flag-Football-2026-27-Blue-Book.pdf>

NFHS Flag Football Rules Book (2026-27)

<https://nfhs.org/sports/flag-football/rules>

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