

COACHING GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL FLAG FOOTBALL

Most states play the NFHS rulebook. Each state picks a few rules, like field size and overtime. Games are 4 quarters of 12 minutes. Tries are from the 3 or the 10. Check your state's guide too.

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

Girls' high school coaches in states that play NFHS rules.

AGES

Ages 14 to 18

LEVEL

Varsity and JV girls' high school

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. Seven to start

The rule: 7 to start. Players may get hurt or thrown out with no one left to sub in. Only then may a team play short. Never below 5.

A team plays short only when nobody is left on the bench, and never below five. Carry enough players to sub.

NFHS 1-1-3; NFHS changes 1-1-3



Watch how to stat it:
breakawaydata.com/breakaway-u/set-up-roster

2. A line to gain at the 20s and 40s

The rule: 4 downs to get to the line to gain. It is the first 20- or 40-yard line ahead of the ball, set when the series starts. Near the goal, the goal line is the target.

You get 4 downs to make the line to gain. It sits on a 20 or a 40 yard line, set when the series starts. Know it before you call the play.

From a real game:

Harbor Point started at its own 18 after a punt. A 2-yard run reached the 20. In NFHS play, the line to gain is a fixed zone line, here the 20. Reaching it earned a first down.

NFHS 5-1-1; 5-3-1; 2-21-4



Watch how to stat it:
breakawaydata.com/breakaway-u/move-the-ball

3. Tries from the 3 or the 10, and the trailing team may keep the ball

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.

After scoring, a team still behind may choose to keep possession. Plan that decision before the game, not after the touchdown.

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

4. A declared punt

The rule: Yes, a real punt. You must call it first. Then kick within 5 seconds of the snap. The other team can run it back, except on a try. Into the end zone, they start at their 14. Punting is on the list of state choices. Kicks off a tee or holder need state approval.

Punts are announced and kicked within seconds of the snap. Practice the punt team if your state plays it.

From a real game:

On 4th down at its own 15, LC Legends punted for real. The kick traveled 47 yards, and Harbor Point fielded it at its own 18. In NFHS play, a punt is a real kick that the other team can return.

NFHS 6-1-1, 6-1-2; 3-6-2b; 8-5-3, 8-5-4; Table 1-7 #20; MPSSAA item 13



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



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

5. 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.

Teach arms in. Using a hand, arm or the ball to block a pull costs 10 yards. That can wipe out a big gain.

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

6. Hurdling is a foul, and touching down ends the run

The rule: Hurdling a player costs 10 yards. If the defense does it, the offense also gets a first down. Hurdling has a new definition for 2026-27. A runner is down if a knee, hip or anything else besides a hand or foot hits the ground.

A runner who touches the ground with anything but a hand or foot is down. Teach carriers to stay on their feet.

NFHS Penalty summary, 9-4-3c; 4-2-2a; NFHS changes 2-18



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

7. Rushers play the flag

The rule: Not fully checked. The rush rules are in a part of the book we have not read. The penalty list has no rush-line foul. Rushers must go for the flag. Hitting the QB's arm is roughing: 10 yards and a first down.

Contact with the passer's arm is roughing: 10 yards and a first down. Teach rushers to aim at the hip.

NFHS Penalty summary, 9-4-4; Points of Emphasis



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

8. Fumbles are dead on the ground

The rule: The play ends the moment the ball touches the ground. No one can scoop it up. A dropped pass or bobbled ball works the same way. So does a backward pass. A forward fumble that rolls out of bounds comes back to the fumble spot.

Nobody recovers a loose ball. Spend no practice time on fumble drills; spend it on ball security.

NFHS 4-2-2g; 4-3-1



Watch how to stat it:
breakawaydata.com/breakaway-u/change-possession



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

9. Quarters, timeouts and the late clock

The rule: Four quarters of 12 minutes, with a 1-minute break after the 1st and 3rd. Each state sets halftime between 5 and 20 minutes. You get 25 seconds to snap. Each team has 3 timeouts per half, 1 minute each, and loses any it doesn't use. Until the 2-minute mark of each half, an incomplete pass or a runner going out keeps the clock running.

Games are 4 quarters of 12 minutes, with 3 timeouts a half. The clock rarely stops until the last 2 minutes. Practice a fast offense for the end of each half.

NFHS 3-1-1, 3-1-6, Table 3-1; 3-4-4f, g; 3-5-1; 3-6-1



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

10. Pass interference: no automatic first down

The rule: 10 yards. No automatic first down. Most big defensive fouls give one, but not this one.

It is 10 yards but not a free first down. On 4th and long, that changes what a deep shot is worth.

From a real game:

LC Legends had 3rd down at its own 16, needing 4 yards to reach the 20. The defense was called for pass interference. In NFHS play, that is 10 yards with no automatic first down. Here the 10 yards carried them past the 20, so they got one anyway.

NFHS Penalty summary, 7-5-10; 10-1-7



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

Your state decides the rest

Each state picks its field size, overtime, mercy rule, belts and kicking. We have guides for Illinois, North Carolina, Tennessee and Maryland. The rules page compares every state we have read.

NFHS Table 1-7

THE OFFICIAL RULEBOOK

NFHS Flag Football Rules Book (2026-27)

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

The NFHS rulebook is sold by NFHS. BreakAway does not reproduce it: get your copy from NFHS.

STAT YOUR GAMES FREE IN BREAKAWAY

- Statting is free.
- Start from the closest preset in the app. Change what your league does differently. Save it to your team and stat every game.
- 100,000+ ruleset combinations, so your league's rules fit.
- Every game you stat gets a live game center families can follow from anywhere. You also get a box score and a stat card for every athlete. Team leaderboards, season totals and recaps come with it.

