

COACHING IFAF FLAG FOOTBALL

IFAF is the world rulebook. It plays 5 a side with no contact at all. Most fouls come down to who had the spot first. No jumping, no diving and no kicks. Midfield is the only first down. Teach quick feet, quick throws and clean flag pulls.

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

Coaches of club, school and national programs that play international rules.

AGES

Juniors and adults

LEVEL

Junior and adult, competitive

FORMAT

5v5

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.

This plan is written for 7v7. Run the same blocks 5 a side, and use 5v5 plays in the team period.

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


Game day:

stat it free in the BreakAway app

Scan, or visit breakawaydata.com/stats

POSITIONS IN 5V5

Carry 7 to 10 players so everyone rests and everyone plays. Rotate quarterback and center in practice: every player should know both.

OFFENSE

Center

Snap the ball to the quarterback, then releases into a short route. In most 5v5 rulebooks the center is an eligible receiver, so they are your safety valve.

Quarterback

Calls the play, takes the snap and either hands off, pitches or throws. Teach a quick read and a quick release: the rush is coming.

Running back

Lines up beside or behind the quarterback, takes handoffs and pitches, and runs a short route on pass plays.

Wide receivers (2)

Line up wide, run the deeper routes and stretch the defense. One usually runs a go or post to pull the safety away.

DEFENSE

Rusher

Starts back at the rush line with a hand up. On the snap, she runs straight at the quarterback and reaches for the flag.

Cornerbacks (2)

Cover the wide receivers. Stay between her and the end zone. Pull the flag the moment she catches it.

Linebacker

Plays the middle: watches the center and running back, takes away short throws and fills fast on runs.

Safety

The last line. Stays deep, keeps everything in front of her and is the one who must not miss a 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. Non-contact, decided by right of way

The rule: No contact. Who had the spot first, or the path, decides who is at fault. Illegal contact costs 10 yards. The offense also loses the down. Against the defense, it is also a first down.

Fouls are judged by who had the right to the spot and the path. Teach receivers to hold their line and defenders to take a path that does not cross into a runner.

IFAF R2-13; R9-1-1



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

2. Any defender 7 yards off can rush

The rule: Any defender more than 7 yards back may rush. Up to 2 may signal as blitzers and get the right of way. The rest wait for a handoff, fake handoff or pass. The passer has 7 seconds.

Up to 2 can raise a hand as blitzers. The rest wait for a handoff, a fake or a pass. Your quarterback has a short clock. Teach her to throw on time.

IFAF R2-2-6; R7-1-4d-f; R7-1-3g



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

3. No jumping, no diving

The rule: No jumping or diving: 5 yards and the down. Dipping is fine. Spinning is fine unless your flags fly up.

Both are fouls. Dips are fine, and spins are fine as long as the flags do not lift. Coach low, controlled cuts.

IFAF R2-12-3 to 6; R9-2-2b



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

4. Flag guarding includes a hand toward the defender

The rule: Covering your flags or reaching a hand toward the defender. Penalty: 5 yards and the down.

Covering the flags or reaching out toward a defender is a foul. Teach ball carriers to keep arms close and moving.

IFAF R2-12-2; R9-2-2c



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



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

5. Midfield counts once

The rule: 4 downs. Midfield is the only line to gain. Crossing it earns a first down only once per drive.

Midfield is the only first down, and it counts once a drive. Losing yards and crossing it again earns nothing.

From a real game:

On 4th down from its own 5, Desert Ridge threw 25 yards to the opponent's 20. That crossed midfield. Under IFAF rules, midfield is the only first-down line. One throw earned a fresh set of downs to score.

IFAF R2-1-6; R5-1-1a



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

6. No kicks of any kind

The rule: No. Kicking is not allowed at all. Kicking the ball on purpose costs 5 yards and the down.

No punts. A failed series hands the ball over, and the new offense starts at its own 5.

IFAF R2-9-6; R6-1-1



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

7. No-run zones at both ends

The rule: The 5 yards in front of each goal line. If you snap on or inside the 5, you must throw a forward pass. Running there costs 5 yards and the down.

A snap on or inside the 5 must be a forward pass play. Practice red zone passing from the 5 and from the 10.

From a real game:

Trailing 19-14, Bay City had 3rd down at the opponent's 3. In IFAF play, any snap on or inside the 5 must be a pass play. Bay City threw for the touchdown and took a 20-19 lead.

IFAF R2-1-4; R7-1-3f



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

8. The quarterback stays behind the line

The rule: Any number of handoffs behind the line. Backward passes only before the ball crosses it. One forward pass per down, from behind the line. The quarterback can't run past the line unless the ball comes back.

She can cross only if the ball comes back to her. One forward pass a down, and backward passes only before the ball crosses the line.

IFAF R7-1-3e; R7-1-5; R7-2-1; R7-3-1



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



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

9. A fumble stays yours

The rule: The play ends once the ball touches the ground or a teammate touches it. The fumbling team keeps it there. If the player who fumbled, or an opponent, catches it first, play goes on.

A dropped ball stops the play once it lands or a teammate touches it, and your team keeps it. If the player who dropped it, or an opponent, catches it first, play goes on. Teach everyone to play until the whistle.

IFAF R7-2-4



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

10. A big lead runs the clock, not the game

The rule: No rule ends the game early. Lead by 30 or more when the two-minute notice comes, and the clock runs. That lasts for the rest of the half.

There is no game-ending mercy rule; a 30-point lead at the two-minute notice runs the clock. Keep your starters sharp to the end.

IFAF R3-2-6



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



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

Field size can vary by country

National federations may set a field from 40 to 60 yards long and 20 to 30 wide. Ask before your first game and set cones to match in practice.

IFAF Dimensions; National Changes

Rosters

Up to 5 on the field from a roster of up to 15.

IFAF R1-1-1

THE OFFICIAL RULEBOOK

IFAF Flag Football Rules (2023, effective May 1, 2023)

<https://resources.usafootball.com/assets/usawebsite/ifaf-flag-rules-2023.pdf>

STAT YOUR GAMES FREE IN BREAKAWAY

- Statting is free.
- Pick the IFAF Flag Football preset in the app. Change what your league does differently. Then 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.

