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McGILL INTRAMURALS FLAG FOOTBALL RULEBOOK

Updated – August 2025

Sections **highlighted yellow** are major rule changes for the 2025-26 season.

ID. CARDS

- Prior to the start of intramural games students must present their valid McGill ID card to the timer. Staff and Alumni must present their valid Sports Complex Membership Cards. Please indicate to the timer which team you will be playing for. **NO ID. - NO PLAY!**
- All player IDs will be inspected by the scorekeeper and immediately handed back to the participant. IDs will NOT be kept by the scorekeeper and are not the responsibility of the McGill Intramural program.

DEFAULT RULE

- A five **(5) minute** delay to the start of the game will be granted if a team has an insufficient number of players to begin.
- The amount of time that the start of the game was delayed will be subtracted from the first half of play.
- The team responsible for the delay will be assessed a 15-yard penalty from the opening spot possession.
- Should a team still have too few players following the delay, the offending team will default the game. The offending team will automatically lose the game **21-0**.
- **The defaulting team will also be deducted 2 points in the standings**
- If both teams do not have enough players, it will result in a double default.
- **The defaulting team is also subject to a \$60 Default Fee (IM Handbook article 6.1).**
- **This fee must be paid [online](#) before the team's next game, or the team will be disqualified from their respective league.**
- To begin the game, each team must have a minimum of **five (5) players** on the field, dressed, signed-in and ready to play at the scheduled starting time.

EQUIPMENT

- Game balls will be provided but teams may choose to use their own footballs. Referees will not handle the football; the offense is responsible for the ball at all times.

UNIFORM

- PINNIES WILL NOT BE DISTRIBUTED.
- The home team is required to wear a white shirt, and the away team is required to wear a dark shirt. NO LIGHT GREY ALLOWED. See Article 4.1 (McGill Intramural Uniform Policy) of the IM Handbook

- SHORTS or PANTS WITH POCKETS ARE NOT PERMITTED
- All jewelry must be removed or taped including watches, earrings, bracelets, etc. Players may wear soft, pliable basketball or wrestling knee pads on legs, knees and/or ankle.
- Towels may not hang from a player's waist or otherwise interfere with the possible removal of a flag. Towels however, may be used and kept on the ground on the ball before the snap.
- The use of dangerous equipment is prohibited. Sneakers can be worn; cleats are allowed (no metal cleats)

PLAYERS

- This is a 7-player league. Teams must have at least 5 players to start a game.
- Each team shall designate a captain to act as team spokesperson and make decisions. Only the captain may talk to officials. Team representatives including players, spectators, team managers, coaches, and group members are subject to the rules

SUBSTITUTION

- Free substitution is allowed after any whistle, provided the substitution does not delay the game.

COIN TOSS

- The referee will conduct a coin toss, or the captains will perform "Rock, Paper, Scissors" to determine initial possession.
- The winning captain may elect to start on offense or defense, choose the side of the field their team wishes to defend, or defer the 'choice' to the second half.
- Prior to the start of the second half, the choosing options will be reversed unless the winning captain in first half deferred.
- During the playoffs when there is overtime, the same procedure will be repeated as if it were the start of the game.

GAME TIME

- Two (2) - 18-minute halves.
- The clock will start when the ball is legally snapped.
- The clock will run continuously for the first eighteen (18) minutes of each half. At eighteen (18) minutes, the referee will inform both teams that there are **FIVE (5) PLAYS LEFT TO THE HALF/END OF GAME.**
- A half cannot end on a penalty by the defensive team.

OVERTIME

- Only during Playoffs
- No clock.
- Each team will start 1st and goal from the opposing team's 10-yard line (unless moved by penalty). The object will be to score a touchdown (followed by a try for additional points).
- An overtime period consists of each team receiving a set of 3 downs.
- If the score is still tied after one period, the teams will go to a second overtime period, or as many as needed to determine a winner.
- If the first team which is awarded the ball scores, the opponent will still be given an opportunity to win or re-tie the game.
- If the defense intercepts the ball and returns it for a touchdown, they win the game. If they do not return the interception for a touchdown, the ball will be placed on the 10-yard line to begin their series of 3 downs.

TIME OUTS

- Each team is permitted one (1) time out / half and one (1) time out / overtime period. Time outs are not cumulative (i.e., if a team does not use a time out in the first half, they are not entitled to two (2) time outs in the second half).

SERIES OF DOWNS

- A team, in possession of the ball, has three (3) consecutive downs to advance the ball into the

next zone (10 yards) by scrimmage.

- On 3rd down the offensive team can elect to punt.
- A punt will give possession to the opposing team at:
 1. Midfield if the ball was inside the punting teams own 15-yardline
 2. At the opposite 15-yardline if the ball was between the punting teams 15-yardline and midfield
 3. At the 5-yardline if the punting team was across midfield

SCORING PLAYS

- Scoring:
 - a) Touchdown = 6 points
 - b) Safety = 2 points
- After a touchdown is scored, a team is given the choice of going for 1 to 2 points (convert) after scoring a touchdown. Once the captain makes the choice, it may only be changed if a time out is called.
- 1 point conversion = Line of scrimmage at 5-yardline
2-point conversion = Line of scrimmage at 10-yardline
- After a safety is scored, the team that is awarded 2 points will automatically gain possession at their own 35-yard line, unless moved by penalty. Note: If a player steps on the endline of their own endzone a safety will be called.
- If defence intercepts ball during convert, then the defensive player can run it back to the opposing endzone for points of the SAME scale that the offense chose for their conversion.
- Penalty during a convert:
 - A. If on defense:**
If the attempt was unsuccessful, then replay the down and add the penalty enforcement.
If the attempt was successful, and the offense declines the penalty the play stands.
 - B. If on offense:**
If the attempt was unsuccessful and the defense declines the penalty the attempt is over
If the attempt was successful, take the converted score away and the attempt will be repeated once the penalty is enforced.
- A player must have at least one foot in bounds for a catch to be legal. The line is considered out.

RUSHING THE PASSER

- The rusher must be designated before the start of the play.
- The rusher must be positioned a minimum of 7 yards from the line of scrimmage at the moment the ball is snapped. Other defenders may rush the quarterback (blitz), however, the designated rusher must be the first player to cross the line of scrimmage.
- **The designated rusher must be granted an unobstructed path to the quarterback.** The penalty for impeding the rusher's path is 10 yards.

DEFINITION OF PLAYING TERMS

- When the flag belt is clearly taken from the ball carrier the down shall end and the ball is declared dead. A player who removes the flag belt from the ball carrier should immediately hold the flag belt above his head to assist the official in locating the spot where the capture occurred.
- A player may dive to remove a flag belt as long as no contact is made with the opposing team. The position of the ball when a player is de-flagged determines the spot of the next line of scrimmage.
- A defensive player may not hold, push, or knock down the ball carrier in an attempt to remove the flag, nor shall an offensive player hold, block, or run through a defensive player trying to remove the flag belt. **(Penalty: 10 yards)**
- In an attempt to remove the belt from a ball carrier, defensive players may contact the body and shoulder of an opponent with their hands, but not their opponent's face or any part of the neck or head.

- Intentionally pulling or removing a belt from any player that does not have possession of the ball. **(Penalty: 10 yards - and if a player repeats this rule violation they will be ejected).**
- All **'tackles'** will be penalized by a **10-yard penalty and a game ejection** of the guilty player.
- Ball carriers shall not guard their flags in a manner that would prevent an opponent the opportunity to pull or remove the flag belt. **A natural running motion must be employed at all times.** A ball carrier may not use straight arm tactics, swing arm to deflect, or use other means to keep an opponent from pulling a flag **(Penalty: 10 yards from spot of penalty)**
- It is also considered flag guarding if a ball carrier lowers his/her head or runs in a bent over fashion such that it hinders an opponent from pulling a flag **(Dead ball at the point of infraction – minus 10 yards)**
- When a ball carrier loses their flags while running, the defending team must ONE hand touch the ball carrier to "deflag" them. This 1 HAND TOUCH needs to be clear to the refs and it is at their discretion to allow play to continue or call it dead after the one hand touch took place.
- The **'scrimmage line'** for the *offensive team* is the yard line and its imaginary vertical & horizontal plane, which passes through the point of the ball nearest the offensive team's goal line. The **'scrimmage line'** for the *defensive team* is the imaginary vertical & horizontal plane one yard away from the nearest point of the ball. i.e.. the defensive team must be a minimum of one (1) yard from the nearest point of the ball when it has been correctly spotted on the line of scrimmage.
- Running is not permitted on two consecutive plays. Running is not permitted in REDZONE (7-yardline – first cone).
- Simultaneous Catch. If a forward pass is caught by members of opposing teams, the ball shall become dead with possession belonging to the team last in possession at the spot of the catch.

DEAD BALL, OUT-OF-BOUNDS

- The ball is declared dead when the ball touches the ground:
 - i) on a fumble
 - iii) on a pass
- While an offensive or defensive player is out of bounds, they may not engage in the play until such time that they have re-entered the field of play. **(Penalty: 5 yards and replay the down)**
- The **'sidelines'** and **'end lines'** are considered out of bounds. (Only one foot needs to touch in bounds in order for a pass to be complete).
- The ball is dead on all running plays & passing plays as soon as the ball touches the ground. Teams cannot recover a fumble and continue the play. The play resumes with the offensive team retaining possession at the point of the fumble - next down.
- Laterals are NOT PERMITTED. If a lateral is attempted, it will be a dead ball at the spot of the infraction.

BLOCKING

- There is no blocking in touch football. A player may use their feet to gain position, but may not intentionally impede the defensive team's pursuit of the ball carrier. **(Penalty: 10 yards from the spot of the foul)**
- The arms and hands may not be used to grab or push the opponent aside. Defensive players must go around the ball carrier's teammates. The application of this rule depends entirely on the judgment of the official. A rusher may use his/her arms or hands to break a fall or retain their balance. **(Penalty: 10 yards from the spot of the foul)**
- There shall be no bumping, checking, or other intentional contact between a defender and an offensive pass receiver. Contact with an opponent on the ground is prohibited. If a player attempting a diving flag removal trips the ball carrier there is a penalty. **(Penalty: 10 yards from the spot of the foul)**

KICKING GAME

- There is no kicking game. Opening possession of each half will start at the 15-yardline.
- After a touchdown is scored possession will start at the opposing 15-yardline.

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SNAPPING, HANDLING, AND PASSING THE BALL

- The ball must be snapped between the legs of the center/snapper, or sideways like a rugby throw from the ground.
- The player who receives the snap must be at least 5 yards behind the offensive scrimmage line. (*Direct snaps under center are illegal*).
- The offensive team may only have 2 halfbacks positioned behind the quarterback. Everyone else must be lined up between the quarterback and the line of scrimmage.
- All players are eligible for a forward pass. The passer may pass from anywhere behind the 'line of scrimmage'.
- Only one forward pass is allowed per play (down). Forward passes are those thrown from behind the line of scrimmage.
- The passer shall not intentionally ground the ball in order to avoid a sack. **(Penalty: 5 yards and loss of down)**
- It is defensive pass interference if an eligible receiver is de-flagged prior to touching the ball on a forward pass attempt.

PLAYER CONDUCT

- It is illegal to steal or attempt to steal (strip) the ball from a player in possession. The object of the game is to deflag a ball carrier, not to steal the ball. **(Penalty: 10 yards from the end of the run)**
- *Roughing the passer* - Defensive players must make a definitive effort to avoid charging into the passer after the ball has been thrown and may not make contact with the throwing arm. **(Penalty: 10 yards and automatic first down, tack on the end of the play - if positive yards have been gained, if not, 10 yards from the original spot and automatic first down)**
- *Guarding the flag belt* - Ball carriers shall not guard their flags by blocking, with arms, hands or ball, the opportunity for an opponent to pull or remove the flag belt. **(Penalty: 10 yards)**
- The defensive player shall not (intentionally or accidentally) hold, grasp, or obstruct forward progress of a ball carrier when in the act of removing the flag belt. **(Penalty: 10 yards)**

MAJOR RULE AND PENALTY HIGHLIGHTS

- Incidental contact is part of competing. All participants are reminded to keep away from heavy contact. Players must refrain from pushing, pulling, holding, and tripping.

PENALTY	BY WHO	RESULT
Illegal forward handoff	offense	Dead ball and loss of down
Illegal forward pass	offense	Dead ball and loss of down
Illegally secured flag belt	offense	Loss of down and 5yds
"	defense	Auto. 1st down and 5yds
Pass interference (personal)	offense	Loss of down and 10yds
"	defense	Auto. 1st down and 10yds
Illegal contact/ block (personal)	offense	Loss of 10yds @ spot
"	defense	Add 10yds. to offense
Roughing the passer (personal)	defense	Auto. 1st down and 10yds
Flag Guarding (personal)	offense	Loss of 10yds @ spot
"	defense	Loss of 10yds @ spot
Offside on kick-off	offense	Re-kick and loss of 10yds
False start (before snap)	offense	Stop play, loss of 5yds, repeat down
Illegal snap (movement of ball)	offense	Stop play, loss of 5yds, repeat down
Encroachment (before ball snap)	defense	Stop play, loss of 5yds, repeat down

Offside	offense	Stop play, loss of 5yds, repeat down
Offside – defensive rusher	defense	Stop play, loss of 5yds, repeat down
Delay of game (after 25sec)	offense	Stop play, loss of 5yds, repeat down
Illegal motion/ shift (with snap)	offense	Loss of 5yds @ spot, repeat down
Illegal substitution (dead balls only)	offense/defense	Loss of 5yds, repeat down
Too many players on the field	offense/defense	Loss of 5yds, repeat down
Intentional grounding to avoid a sack	offense	Loss of 5 yards and loss of down
Illegal snap (QB must be at least 5yds from ball)	offense	Loss of 5yds @ spot, repeat down

SPECIAL SITUATIONS

- 1) Double penalties will offset each other - repeat down
- 2) One (1) offensive player is allowed to be in motion at any particular time
- 3) 25 second play clock.