



Special Olympics Minnesota Flag Football Handbook

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COACH CERTIFICATION RATIO TABLE

The updated coach certification ratio tables can be found in the Special Olympics Minnesota Coaches Portal under policies and fact sheets, or here: [Coach Ratio Table](#)

MORE INFORMATION

Practice ideas, skill assessment/development, and rules can be found in the SOI Quick Start Guides and SOI Rules for each respective sport can be found at www.specialolympics.org/sports.aspx

RULES OF COMPETITION

General Gameplay

The game is played as non-contact. In all aspects of Special Olympics flag football, rulings by officials will be made with player safety as the primary consideration.

Rosters must have a minimum of 6 participants, with a minimum of 3 Unified partners. The maximum roster size is 16 participants. The game is played 5 versus 5, with 3 athletes and 2 Unified partners always on the field. Failure to adhere to the required ratio results in a forfeit.

A coin flip will be used to determine the first possession. Teams can choose to receive the ball in the first half or defer to the second half. The game is comprised of two 18-minute running time halves. Stop time is during the last two minutes of each half, where the clock will stop on all dead balls, resuming on the snap. A play ending in-bounds will result in the clock continuing to run throughout the entire game.

Running time will begin in the second half if a team is ahead by 21 points or more. If a team has a lead of 25 or more points anytime past the 9-minute mark in the second half, they will be declared the winner of the game. Teams will still play out the rest of the game, but scoring will not be updated on the scoreboard or scoresheet. All other facets of gameplay (penalties, substitutions, etc.) will continue throughout the entirety of the game. Scoresheets will mark if this mercy rule was used.

Teams will have 40 seconds between downs to run their next play. Teams will receive one timeout per half, as well as an additional one should the game go to overtime. There is no carryover from regulation with timeouts. Each timeout is for one minute.

Touchdowns will be worth 6 points. For extra points, teams will select to either attempt a play from the 5-yard line or the 10-yard line. A successful attempt from the 5-yard line will result in 1 point. A successful attempt from the 10-yard line will result in 2 points. A safety will occur if an offensive player leaves the back of the end zone (behind the 45-yard line) or has their flag pulled in the end zone (between the 40- and 45-yard lines). A safety is worth 2 points, and results in a change of possession.

Overtime

A coin flip will be used to determine the first possession. The winner of the coin flip can choose to receive the ball first or second. Each team will receive two plays from the 35-yard line. The team gaining the most yards wins. If the same yardage is gained or a touchdown is scored by both teams, each team receives one additional play from the 35-yard line. If the tie continues, each team will continue with one additional play from the 35-yard line until the tie is broken.

A turnover will result in a loss of a play, not an entire possession. If a team scores a touchdown on their first play, they will still receive a second play. If a team gets a safety on the first play of overtime, they start their second play from the 40-yard line. The defense will not be awarded points on the safety. All penalty yardages will count toward total yards gained. Overtime cannot end on a defensive penalty unless the offensive team has more total yards.

Offense

All possessions, except interceptions, will start from the 35-yard line. The offensive team will have four plays to cross the 20-yard line (midfield). If a team reaches midfield, they will receive four additional plays to score a touchdown. If the offensive team fails to cross midfield or score a touchdown in the allotted number of plays, there will be a change in possession.

The play starts when an offensive player snaps the ball at the line of scrimmage. The offensive player can snap either between their legs or sideways. The center is allowed to straddle the football when snapping from the side and will not be considered offsides for being in the neutral zone. There is no minimum number of players required on the line of scrimmage at the snap.

If the ball is snapped and not caught, the play is dead, and the down is counted. The next play starts from the spot where the ball was snapped, not where it landed. The quarterback is defined as the player who receives the snap directly from the center. This person cannot run with the ball across the line of scrimmage. If a player in motion receives the snap, they are considered the quarterback. In this scenario, the defense will be permitted to rush the quarterback immediately, as this will be considered as a play-action tactic giving the offensive team a distinctive advantage.

There are two “no running zones” on the field of play. One section is between the 20- and 25-yard line, and the other is between the 0- and 5-yard line. No handoffs are allowed in the “no running zone”.

Flea flickers are allowed, but must be an overhand, backward pass that happens behind the line of scrimmage. The pass cannot be from Unified Partner to Unified Partner. The quarterback is eligible as a wide receiver.

Backward handoffs are permitted, while pitches or laterals are not permitted. This means that only direct handoffs behind the line of scrimmage are legal. Pitches and laterals will be penalized. A player may pass the ball after taking a direct handoff, provided the player is behind the line of scrimmage. Shovel passes are allowed but must be received beyond the line of scrimmage.

Screen Blocking

Legally obstructing an opponent without contacting them with any part of the screen blocker's body is allowed. The screen blocker should have their arms fully extended to the ground, below the waist, either at their side, in front, or behind their back. Any use of arms, elbows, legs, or shoulders to initiate contact during the screen block is illegal. A player must be on their feet before, during, and after screen blocking. Screen blocking is the only form of legal blocking that can be used by any player at any time.

One form of legal blocking is backfield blocking. The screen blocker must give an opponent at least one step, not initiate contact with the opponent, and not take a position so close to a moving opponent that the opponent cannot avoid contact by stopping or changing directions. If any of those requirements are violated, and contact results, the screener has committed an illegal block. After the snap of the ball, a blocker may move laterally or backward two steps.

Another form of legal blocking is downfield blocking. This consists of a non-moving screen, like a screen in basketball. The blocker also may not run between a rusher and ball carrier impeding a defender's progress to the flag.

Defense

All players who rush the quarterback must be a minimum of 7 yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped. A special marker, placed by the official, will designate the spot 7 yards from the line of scrimmage. Players not rushing the quarterback may defend the line of scrimmage.

Once the quarterback hands off the ball, the 7-yard zone no longer exists. All defenders are eligible to rush after a handoff. On play action plays, the 7-yard zone no longer applies. The defense will be allowed to rush once the intent to handoff has happened.

If a team is stopped on downs, the other team will start on offense from the 35-yard line. Interceptions cannot be returned, and the team will start from the spot of the interception but reversed. For example, if the defense gets an interception at the 10-yard line, they will start their possession at the 25-yard line. If a ball is fumbled, the play is ruled dead. The offensive team retains possession at the spot of the fumble. If a fumble occurs on fourth down, there will be a change of possession.

Unified Partners

Teams must have a minimum of 3 registered Unified partners on each team, and there will always be 2 on the field. Failure to adhere to this ratio will result in a forfeit.

Unified partners may play any position on offense or defense. A Unified partner cannot pass to another Unified partner. If the ball is tipped by an athlete first, then a Unified partner can catch the ball. There is no restriction on who can receive a handoff.

Teams are not allowed to have an additional non-playing Unified partner on the field to assist an athlete. This will be penalized as too many players on the field. Coaches and non-playing Unified partners can be on the field before play starts but must be off the field and on their team’s bench prior to the snap.

Unified partners on the field during the play can serve as mentors for other players on the team. All Unified partners must wear wristbands throughout the entirety of the competition to assist officials with identifying roles.

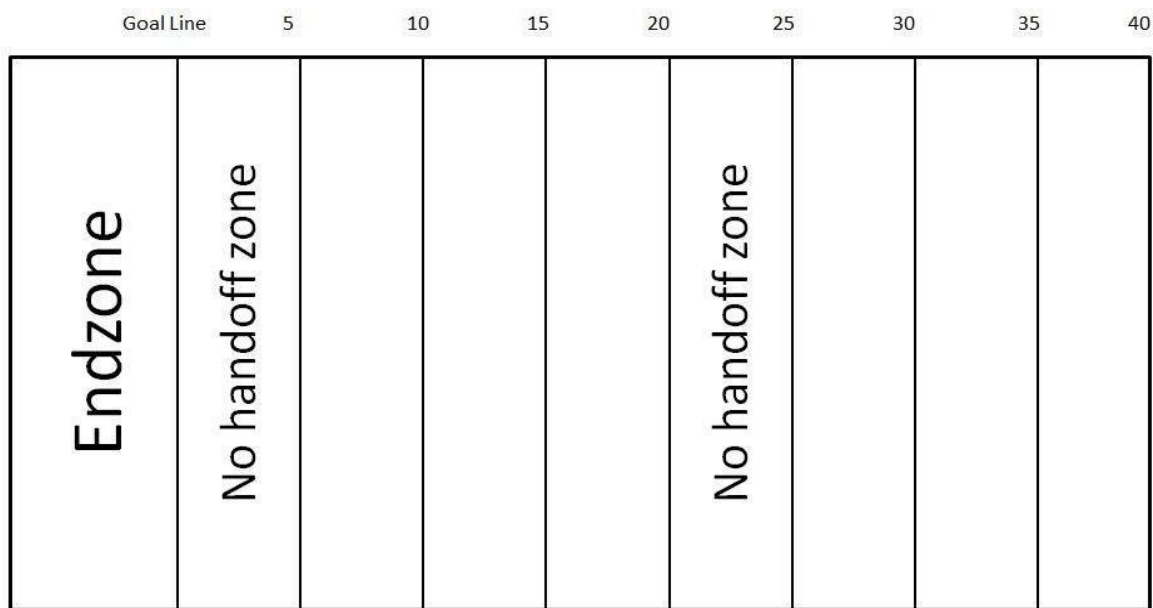
Equipment and Uniforms

An intermediate youth football (size 4) will be used in all divisions. A protective mouthpiece must always be worn. All athletes must wear shoes. Metal, metal tipped, and hard spikes are not allowed. Plastic spikes and flat soled athletic shoes are permitted. No jewelry may be worn, including rings, bracelets, necklaces, and earrings.

A one-piece, three-flag belt will always be worn and will be provided by Special Olympics. Numbers must be displayed on the back of all jerseys. No specifications for numbers are required. The jersey must always be tucked in during competition, so it is not covering the flags. Baseball hats and other brimmed hats are prohibited.

FIELD LAYOUT

The only possession that does not start from the 35-yard line is an interception. The team that intercepts the ball will still go the one direction, but they will start from the point of interception.



All possessions go one direction towards the endzone. New possessions start from the 35 yard line.

PENALTIES

Offense

All offensive penalties are 10 yards from the line of scrimmage, or half the distance to the goal and loss of down on a live play. If it is a pre-snap penalty, the team is penalized for the yardage and repeats the down.

- Illegal Motion: more than one player moving at the snap or any player moving forward at the snap
- Offside: in neutral zone at snap, false start
- Illegal Forward Pass: Unified partner to Unified partner
- Illegal Running Play: handoff inside the no handoff zone
- Pass Interference: pushing or "picking" a defender
- Illegal Contact: holding, blocking, bumping, running through someone
- Flag Guarding: an act by the ball carrier to prevent a defender from pulling their flags by staff arm, lowering elbow or head, or by blocking flags with hand or arm
- Delay of Game: failing to snap within 40 seconds of play clock
- Unsportsmanlike Conduct: a rude, confrontational, or offensive behavior which may or may not include inappropriate language (referee's discretion)

Defense

All defensive penalties are 10 yards from the line of scrimmage and an automatic first down. The only exception is defensive pass interference, which can be 10 yards or the spot of the foul, as well as the automatic first down.

- Offside: defensive encroachment at the snap of the ball
- Illegal Contact: contact with a receiver past 5 yards of the line of scrimmage
- Illegal Flag Pull: intentionally pulling the flag off a player not possessing the ball
- Illegal Rushing: a player inside of the 7-yard marker crossing the line of scrimmage prior to a direct handoff or pass
- Defensive Holding: using the hands to pull and hold the offensive player while outside the 5-yard mark of the line of scrimmage
- Stripping: intentionally knocking the ball out of the runner's possession
- Unnecessary Roughness: an illegal action where a player uses methods beyond what is physically necessary (referee's discretion)
- Unsportsmanlike Conduct: a rude, confrontational, or offensive behavior which may or may not include inappropriate language (referee's discretion)

Other

In the red zone (inside the 20-yard line), no penalty may take the ball more than half the distance to the offender's goal line. All penalties must be accepted, but the yardage may be declined.

GLOSSARY AND SUPPLEMENT TO RULES

Dead Ball: The play is marked dead when a player with the ball runs out of bounds, an incomplete pass occurs, or if the referee requests the clock to be stopped.

Delay of Game: The ball must be put in play promptly and legally and any action or lack of action by either team that tends to prevent this is considered a delay of game. This includes interrupting the 40-second count for any reason except a granted timeout, consuming more than 40 seconds to snap the ball, failing to remove an injured player for whose benefit an excess timeout has been granted, or deliberately advancing the ball after it has been declared dead.

Diving: A defensive or offensive player may dive to catch a pass; however, diving is illegal when used to down a player or advance a ball. A player cannot dive to gain extra yardage. The team will be penalized accordingly.

Eligible Receiver: In the green color model, this includes all offensive players. In the yellow or red color model, Unified partners are ineligible to be a receiver if a Unified partner is throwing the pass. Unified teams are expected to comply with this rule without intervention by officials. Failure to self-patrol will be considered unsportsmanlike and will be penalized accordingly.

False Start: No member of the offensive team may simulate the start of the play before the ball is snapped.

Hurdling: Jumping over or attempting to jump over a player, by the ball carrier, to prevent from being downed or to gain additional yardage is illegal.

Inadvertent Whistle: When this happens, the team in possession of the ball may choose to accept the result of the play at the point where the play was blown dead or choose to replay the down.

Line of Scrimmage: Vertical plane through the point of the ball nearest to the team's goal line. Each player on a team must be on its side of the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped. The only exception is the center who may straddle the line of scrimmage while hiking the ball.

Motion: Only one player of the offensive team may be in motion at the snap. This player must be behind the quarterback and not moving toward its goal line at the time the ball is snapped. If the player comes to a stop, they must be set for one second.

Shift: The action of one or more offensive players who after taking set positions move to a new position prior to the snap. A player who shifts must reset for one second prior to the snap.

Substitution: Any player on the roster may enter upon the completion of a play when the ball is dead. Every rostered player must play in each game.

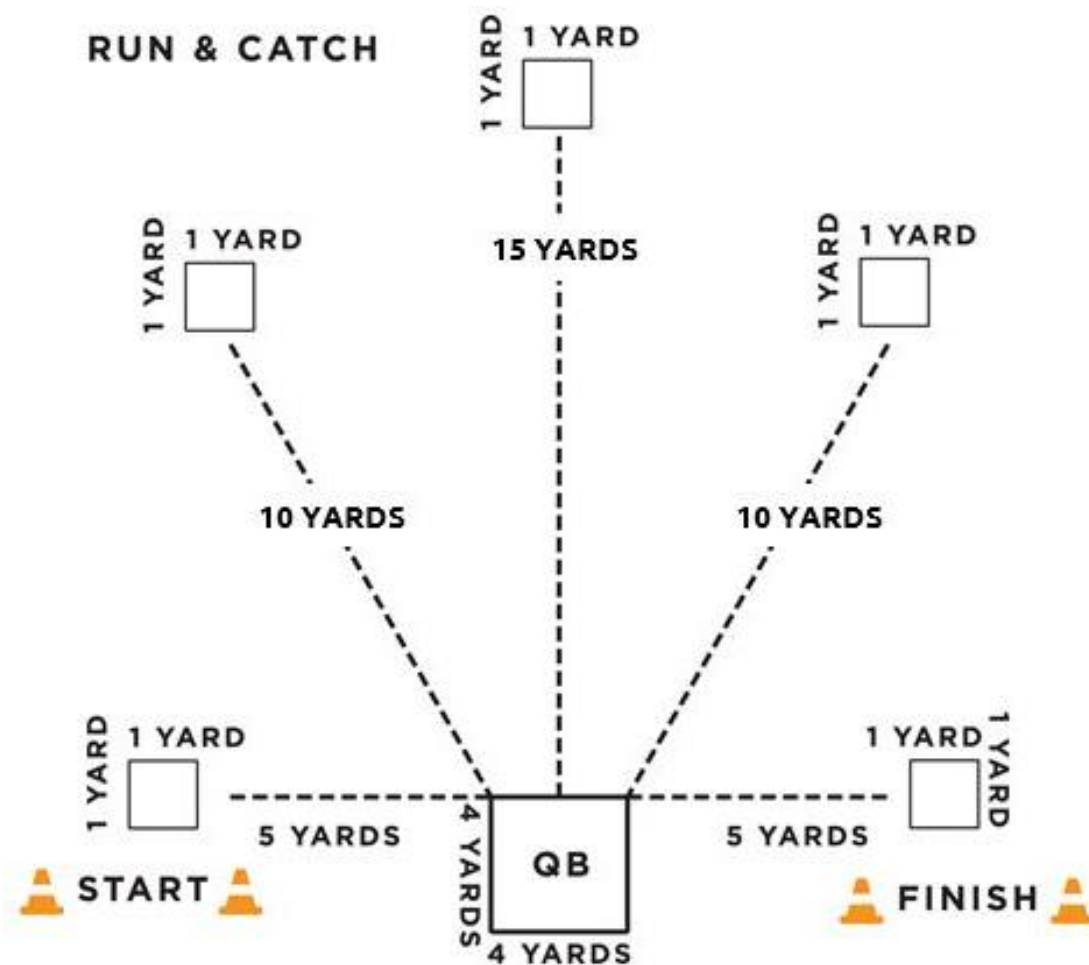
INDIVIDUAL SKILLS RULES

Catching: "Run and Catch"

The purpose of this station is to measure the athlete's ability to catch a football. A starting line, finish line, quarterback box, and five catching spots should be marked on the field, as the diagram below shows. The starting line should be placed on the left side of the quarterback and the finish line on the right.

Each athlete will begin at the starting line. Once the official quarterback gives the signal, the athlete must run to each catching box in numerical order, stopping to catch a pass at each spot. Once the ball is caught, the athlete drops the ball and goes to the next catching box. Once the last ball is caught, the athlete will proceed through the finish line. If a throw from the quarterback is deemed inaccurate, athletes will receive an additional throw from the same spot.

Athletes will receive 2 points for each completed catch, and 0 points if the athlete is unable to catch a well-thrown pass. Athletes can gain a maximum of 10 points.

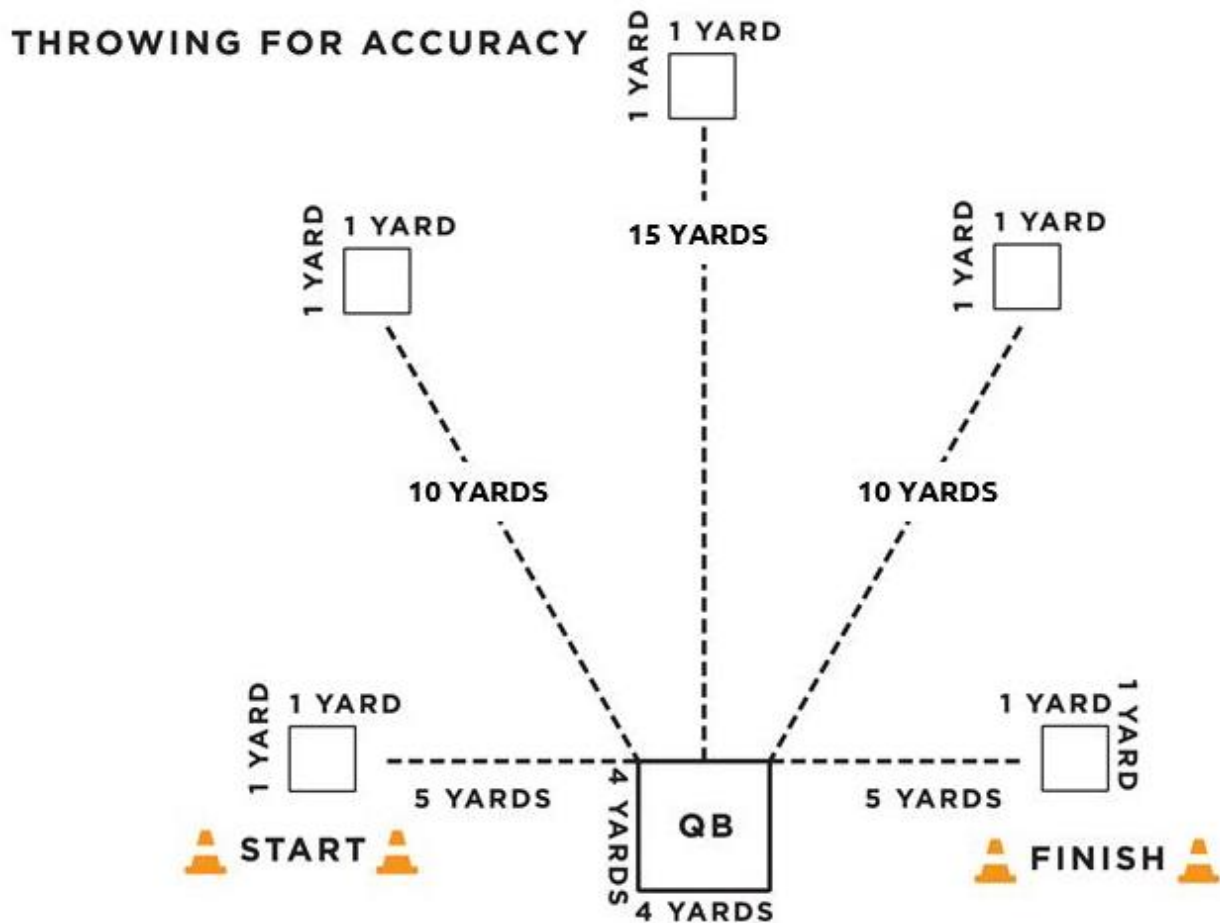


Throwing for Accuracy

The purpose of this station is to measure the athlete's ability to throw a football. A starting line, finish line, quarterback box, and five catching spots should be marked on the field, as the diagram below shows. The starting line should be placed on the left side of the quarterback and the finish line on the right.

The athlete stands inside the quarterback box. Five human targets or volunteers are placed in each catching spot. The athlete must throw to each target in numerical order, gaining points for completed passes. The throw must be overhand, and the receiver must stay in the catching box. Scoring is based on accuracy of the throw and not on the volunteer catching the pass.

Athletes will receive 2 points for each accurate or completed throw, and 0 points if the receiver is unable to catch the ball in the targeted area. If the ball hits the ground before reaching the target, the throw will be recorded as a failed attempt. Athletes can gain a maximum of 10 points.

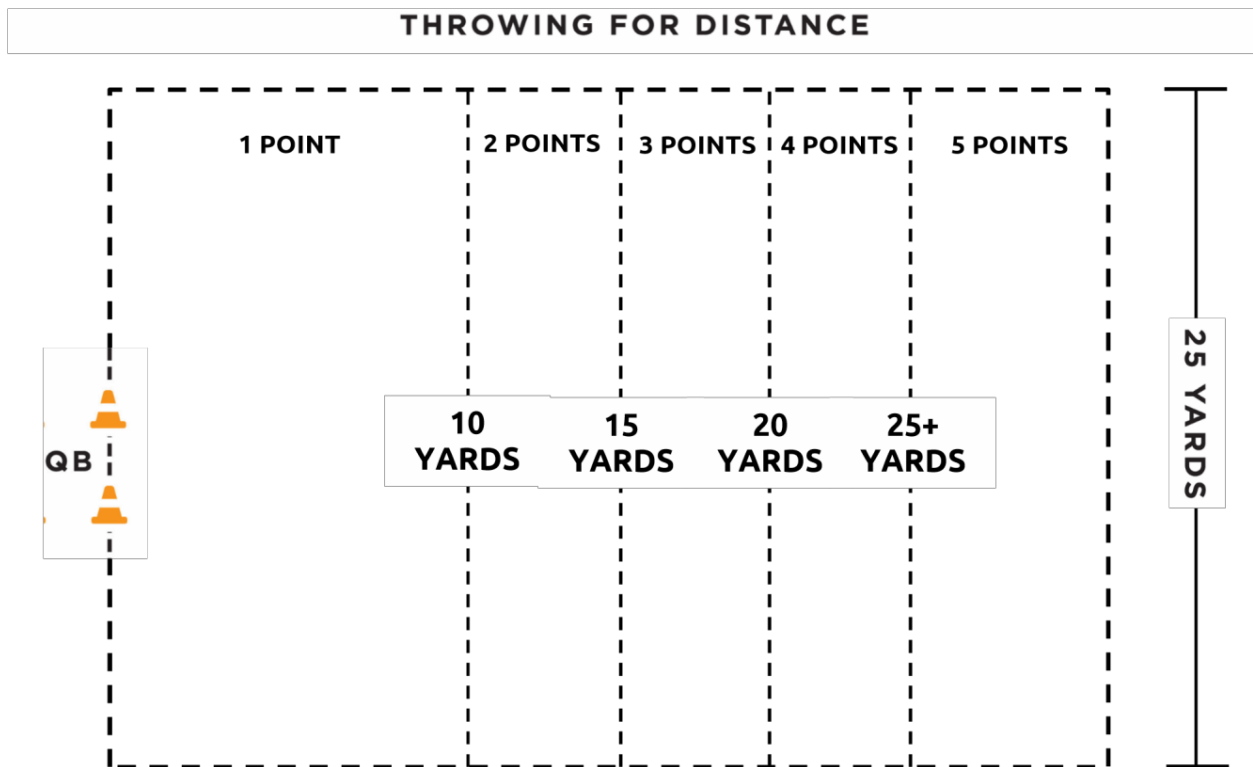


Throwing for Distance

The purpose of this station is to measure the athlete's ability to throw a football for distance.

Each athlete gets two attempts to throw the football as far as possible. Athletes will receive a maximum of 5 points per throw. Athletes can gain a maximum of 10 points. Here are the possible point totals:

- 1 point: 0-10 yards
- 2 points: 10-15 yards
- 3 points: 15-20 yards
- 4 points: 20-25 yards
- 5 points: 25+ yards



Agility and Speed Handoff

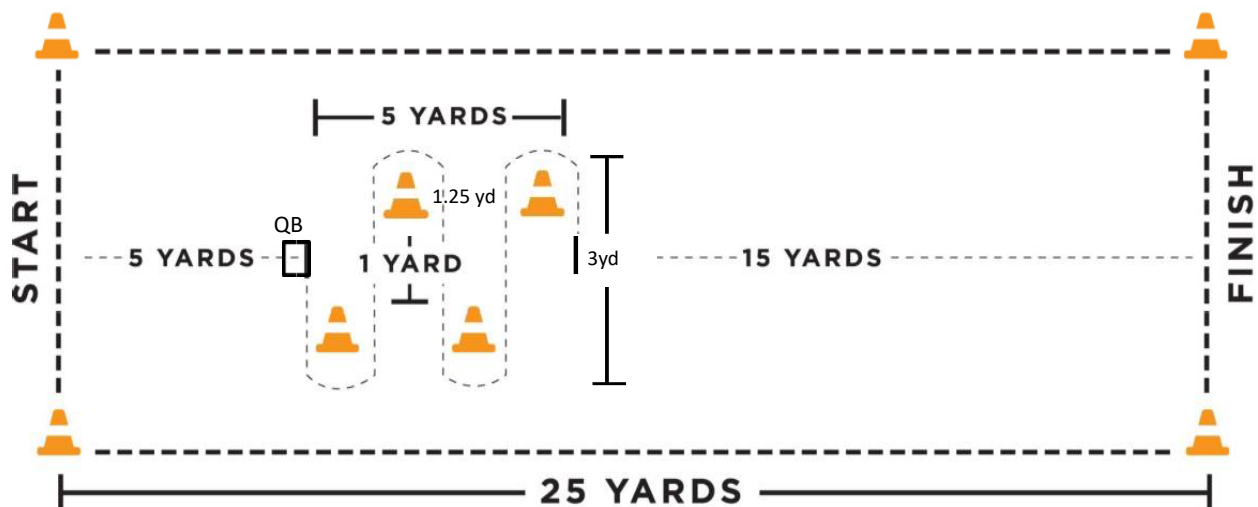
The purpose of this station is to measure the athlete's speed, agility, and ability to receive a handoff. The ball is marked 20 yards from the goal line. The quarterback will be positioned with the ball. The athlete will begin 25 yards from the goal line and between the cones.

The quarterback will say "hike" and hand the ball off to the athlete. The clock will start on the quarterback's handoff to the athlete. The athlete must maneuver around the four cones and sprint to the goal line between the cones and must maintain possession of the football. Each cone will be 1.25 yards apart. A fumble at the exchange will result in a redo. If an athlete loses control of the ball during the station, the clock will continue to run. The athlete can recover the ball, however, if the ball goes outside the width of the cones, the athlete can either pick up the nearest backup football or recover the errant football to continue the event.

Athletes will receive two attempts. The athlete can receive a maximum of 5 points per attempt for a total of 10 points. Points will be determined based on this scale:

- 1 point: 12.0+ seconds
- 2 points: 10.5-12.0 seconds
- 3 points: 9.01-10.5 seconds
- 4 points: 7.5-9.0 seconds
- 5 points: Under 7.5 seconds

AGILITY & SPEED HANDOFF



DIVISIONING

Coaches complete individual assessment scores for each athlete and add scores to determine team assessment score. Assessment scores are submitted during the online registration process. Coaches must also complete the [Team Information](#) for each team.

Divisioning is based on assessment scores and the results from previous competitions. When divisioning for state, much more emphasis is put on common opponents, coach notes, previous game results, and competitions.

Divisioning is done by Special Olympics Minnesota staff before every competition. The player evaluation sheet for flag football is the same as the individual skills score sheet, which is on page 15 in this handbook.

SPORTSMANSHIP

Good sportsmanship is both the coach's and athlete's commitment to fair play, ethical behavior, and integrity. In perception and practice, sportsmanship is defined as those qualities which are characterized by generosity and genuine concern for others. Below we highlight focus points and ideas on how to teach and coach sportsmanship to your athletes by leading by example.

Competitive Effort

- Put forth maximum effort during each event
- Practice the skills with the same intensity as you would perform them in competition
- Always finish a game; Never quit

Fair Play Always

- Comply with the rules
- Demonstrate sportsmanship and fair play
- Respect the decision of the officials
- Strategy discussions with any athlete and/or partner are prohibited once the game begins
 - If an official determines that a coach, partner, or spectator is violating this rule, the official may sanction the offending individual. Sanctions may include verbal warning, citing the coach/partner with unsportsmanlike conduct, or expulsion from the games.

QUALIFYING SCORES INFORMATION

Flag Football Individual Skills

Last Name, First Name	XX
Delegation	Division

Run & Catch

An athlete will attempt to catch a pass from five designated spots marked on the field. Two points are awarded for each catch that is made, zero points if the athlete does not catch the ball. Add all five scores for a total score. If the QB has an inaccurate throw that is not catchable, they must rethrow.

	+		+		+		+		+		subtotal
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Throwing for Accuracy

An athlete will attempt to throw the ball to five designated spots marked on the field. Two points are awarded for each accurate throw, zero points if ball hits the ground prior to target area. Add all five scores for a total score. Scoring is based on the accuracy, not the receiver catching the ball.

	+		+		+		+		subtotal
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Throwing for Distance

An athlete will have two attempts to throw the ball as far as possible. Scoring is based on the distance they throw, add two throws together for final score.

Distances	Points
0-10 yds	1
10-15 yds	2
15-20 yds	3
20-25 yds	4
25+ yds	5

Throw 1	+	Throw 2	subtotal

Agility & Speed: Hand-off

An athlete will have two attempts to take the handoff, maneuver through cones and run to the endzone. Scoring is based on the time it takes to complete the run, add two times together for final score.

Seconds	Points
under 7.5	5
7.5-9	4
9.1-10.5	3
10.5-12	2
over 12	1

Trial 1	+	Trial 2	subtotal

Final Score

A player's final score is determined by adding together the scores achieved in each of the four events which comprise the Individual Skills Competition.

Total

<p>A. Defense (one choice – should be the most representative of the athlete’s skill level)</p> <p>The athlete is unable to follow the opposing player he/she is guarding (1)</p> <p>The athlete knows where to go on defense or who to guard but is limited in stopping an opposing player (2)</p> <p>The athlete pulls the flag from the offensive player if he/she is near them (3)</p> <p>The athlete runs after the offensive player to grab the flag on most plays (4)</p> <p>The athlete frequently stops the offensive player or will defend/intercept a pass (5)</p>
<p>B. Rushing (one choice – should be the most representative of the athlete’s skill level)</p> <p>The athlete needs direction on when and where to run (1)</p> <p>The athlete knows where to run but doesn’t avoid the defense (2)</p> <p>The athlete avoids the defense occasionally (3)</p> <p>The athlete avoids the defense frequently (4)</p> <p>The athlete gains significant yardage on a majority of the handoffs he/she receives (5)</p>
<p>C. Game Awareness (one choice – should be the most representative of the athlete’s skill level)</p> <p>The athlete exhibits frequent coaching on what to do on both offense and defense (1)</p> <p>The athlete exhibits an understanding of the basic game situations (2)</p> <p>The athlete has a fair knowledge of offensive and defensive plays but still requires coaching (3)</p> <p>The athlete has a clear understanding of offensive and defensive plays (requires little coaching) (4)</p> <p>The athlete has a clear understanding of not only their role in the game, but of their teammates’ roles as well and is able to use that knowledge to direct play on the field. (5)</p>
<p>D. Throwing (one choice – should be the most representative of the athlete’s skill level)</p> <p>The athlete has difficulty throwing the ball (1)</p> <p>The athlete can throw 5-10 yards (2)</p> <p>The athlete can throw 10-20 yards with limited accuracy (3)</p> <p>The athlete can throw 10-20 yards with accuracy (4)</p> <p>The athlete can throw 20+ yards with limited accuracy (5)</p> <p>The athlete can throw 20+ yards with accuracy (6)</p>
<p>E. Catching (one choice – should be the most representative of the athlete’s skill level)</p> <p>The athlete has difficulty catching most thrown balls (1)</p> <p>The athlete is able to catch balls thrown directly to him/her (2)</p> <p>The athlete is able to catch some balls not thrown directly on target (3)</p> <p>The athlete is able to regularly catch balls thrown off target (4)</p>