

2026 CIF State Adoptions and Interpretations

Purpose

This document contains California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) state adoptions, approved interpretations, administrative procedures, and points of emphasis for the 2026 NFHS Girls Flag Football Rules. Unless specifically modified herein, all NFHS Girls Flag Football Rules remain in effect.

Please take note of the interpretations from NFHS following the State Rules interpreter meeting regarding blocked punts.

A statewide standard for screen blocking is being emphasized. Officials are being instructed to call this foul tight when there is contact. It is important to understand what a screen blocker can legally do.

There are significant changes to overtime and the mercy rule in CIF play.

2026 CIF By State Adoption

NFHS Rule 1, Table 1-7

CIF will use Field diagram # 1 – 240'X 120' with two 10-yard end zones. Hash marks will be used that are the width of the goal post or 23' apart. The hash marks will be centered on the field. Pylons, outside each endline, may be used to indicate where the hash marks should be if permanent lines are not on the playing surface.

- a. For tournament play (multiple games in one day and/or limited playing space) – a field that is 120' X 120' may be used. (diagram at the end of this document)
 - i. The team box will be between the 10-yard lines, and the restricted area will be no less than 2 yards.
 - ii. The 120' X 120' field size will have only one "LINE TO GAIN" at midfield (the 20-yard line for each A & B)
 - iii. Hash marks must always be used, and some accommodation (e.g., pylons or cones) will be made to show them if permanent lines are not on the field.

CIF will use a minimum of 3 officials for each contest.

Officials will assume authority of the field 30 minutes before the contest.

Not applicable for CIF. CIF will require that all team boxes be set as in field diagram #1.

There will be no “place kicks” in CIF play. No Field Goals, No Kickoff from a tee. When the flag football field is centered on a tackle football field, the goal posts may be substituted for pylons or cones to indicate where the “hash marks” are.

All postseason and playoff football games will be determined by the local CIF Section.

- a. Regarding footballs – All footballs must be inspected prior to the start of the contest.
- b. Pebble-grained leather or composite
- c. Be **TAN/BROWN** in color
- d. Have laces -- however, the need for the 1” stripe at the end of the laces serves no purpose and often is painted on to composite balls, causing the surface to become slick. Should the ball not have these “white strips” at the end of the laces (such as the Shruumz ball), it **WILL BE LEGAL** when it meets all other requirements. (The Shrummz ball without stripes is legal when it meets all other requirements)
- e. Meet all sizing requirements outlined in the NFHS Rule Book 1.3.1

CIF will not have a kick-off. A kicking tee is neither required nor approved.

All supplementary equipment must be approved by the CIF Section overseeing the contest or the State Office.

CIF will not use instant replay for postseason play.

All commemorative patches be approved by the local CIF Section or the State Office in writing and presented to game officials when they assume authority of the field.

Flags -

Flags – CIF will use 2 Flags (one on each hip). Flags must disconnect from the belt. The Flag **MUST contrast with the uniform shorts/pants**. The flag belt **MUST be worn at the waist** so that each flag is situated on the outermost part above/at the pelvis. The belt **MUST be tight enough to prevent movement during the player’s movement**. Should the belt or flags shift during play and affect the defense’s ability to pull a flag, the play may be called “dead” by the game official and/or a flag guarding penalty enforced at the spot the belt shifted.

A 3rd and 10 @ B- 30. After receiving a pass at the B-25, player A44’s flag belt (which is loose) shifts at the B-22 and prevents B24 from being able to pull the flag.
– Ruling – A 4th and 3 @ B-22 or A 3rd and 12 @ B-32 (after a 10-yard flag guarding penalty). The covering official shall determine whether the shifted belt materially affected the defender’s opportunity to pull the flag. If so, flag guarding may be enforced under NFHS Rule 9.9.1.

All flags must meet the minimum size requirements and not be altered in a way that affects the ability of the defense to pull a flag. The maximum size of all flags is 2.5" X 16".

All flag connectors must be designated for youth play. NO ADULT CONNECTORS. Shruumz and other manufacturers alter the color and/or size of the adult connectors to make them easier to distinguish.

Hash marks will be 23'- 24' apart, and each hash mark will be 16 yards (or 48' from each sideline). The use of pylons or cones outside of each endline to indicate the hash mark spacing is **REQUIRED** when the goal post is not centered on the flag football field (to give markings for the hash marks), or there are no markings on the field indicating the spacing of the hash marks.

Overtime Procedures

When the score is tied at the end of regulation, the game will be decided using the following overtime procedure.

General Structure

Overtime will consist of a series from the opponent's 10-yard line followed by a try. Each team will be given an equal opportunity to possess the ball.

If the score remains tied after the first overtime period, a second overtime period will be played. Beginning with the second overtime period, teams will run alternating try plays from the 3-yard line until a winner is determined.

Intermission and Coin Toss

The first overtime period will begin three (3:00) minutes after the conclusion of regulation play.

During this intermission, officials will direct both teams to their respective team areas.

The Referee will conduct a coin toss at midfield with the team captains.

The winner of the coin toss shall choose one of the following: offense or defense for the first overtime period

The loser of the toss shall determine the end of the field that will be used for all overtime periods

There is no option to defer.

First Overtime Period (10-Yard Series + Try)

The ball will be placed on the opponent's 10-yard line, centered between the hash marks.

The offensive team will run a possession series, beginning with a first down.

The possession series continues until: A touchdown is scored or a change of possession occurs

Following the series, the scoring team will attempt a try (Choice of 1 or 2).

After Team A completes its series and try, Team B will be given an opportunity to match or exceed the score using the same procedure.

If Team A scores during its possession, any turnover or failure to score by Team B during its possession will immediately end the game.

The team with the greater number of points at the conclusion of both possessions and tries will be declared the winner.

Second and Subsequent Overtime Periods (3-Yard Alternating Try Format)

Beginning with the second overtime period, each team will attempt a single try from the 3-yard line.

There will be no additional coin toss.

The team that was on offense first in the first overtime period will be on defense first in the second overtime period.

This alternating order will continue in each subsequent overtime period until a winner is determined.

Teams will alternate attempts.

If one team scores and the opponents do not score during the same round, the scoring team is declared the winner.

Timeouts and Timing

Each team is permitted one (1) timeout for all overtime periods.

The game clock is not used during overtime.

The play clock remains in effect.

Additional Guidelines

All overtime periods will be played at the same end of the field as determined by the coin toss.

Officials must clearly communicate possession order, down and distance, and try status prior to each series or attempt.

The first overtime periods are live-ball periods. The defense may score.

Table 1.7 (continued)

When the point margin exceeds 27 points in the 4th quarter, the clock will run continuously for the remainder of the game. The game clock will only stop for team timeouts and officials' timeouts.

Interrupted games will continue only when approved by the CIF section and when required for seeding in postseason play.

Each halftime intermission will be 5-10 minutes long and will be determined by the CIF section overseeing the contest.

The Coin Toss for all CIF contests will take place 4 minutes before the start of the contest, unless a different time has been established before the contest and approved by the Section.

When necessary for media coverage, CIF approved the use of media timeouts not to exceed 2 per period.

CIF will not have place kicking, kick-off, or field goal tries.

Additional CIF Guidelines

ALL PLAYERS RECEIVING A SNAP SHALL BE 2 YARDS BEHIND THE OFFENSIVE LINE OF SCRIMMAGE when the snap is received. Because the NFHS definition of a snap is a backward pass, the player receiving the snap must be at least 2 yards behind the line of scrimmage when the snap ends.

Game Clock –

CIF Varsity-level play is bound by NFHS game clock and timing guidelines. The following exceptions may be implemented when approved (in writing) by the CIF section responsible for the contest.

All teams and officials participating in contests with any of these exceptions will be notified, in writing, a minimum of 7 days prior to the contest.

Tournament exceptions to the game clock –

When multiple games are played in one day (by a single team in tournament format), the NFHS timing rules may be altered to –

Running clock, except for the final 2 minutes of each half of play, then NFHS under two-minute timing rules will be used.

A minimum warm-up time on the playing surface may be set by the host; however, it must be at least 10 minutes. (The playing surface is the field that will be used for the contest)

Non-Varsity contests Game Clock –

Every effort must be made to allow players at all levels to have maximum playing time. However, CIF understands that field space and other circumstances may affect the length of non-varsity contests. The following is allowed when considering the length of non-varsity contests.

The game length must be established 7 days prior to the contest. All participants and officials must be notified in writing (email).

Games may be shortened to 10-minute quarters.

A running clock may be used until the final two minutes of each half, when NFHS under two-minute timing rules must be used.

Schools/ Coaches will always be the authority on the length of the game prior to the contest. There are only two options: #1 – Make a change to the game length with the guidelines above and notify all participants 7 days in advance, or #2 – Use the timing (unaltered) as governed in the NFHS Rule Book.

- Sunglasses are legal unless prohibited by NFHS rules regarding unsafe equipment.
- Hair length is unrestricted. If long hair prevents access to the flag belt, flag guarding may be ruled. Accidental contact with a player's hair while attempting to pull a flag is not a foul.
- The requirements for the center to keep a hand on the ball have been removed. (7.1.3)
- The requirements for the ball to remain at a 90* angle to the LOS have been removed.
- Editorial Changes that affect the game
- No adornments on the tooth and mouth protector.
- Hair may not cover the flag belt.
- Eye shade MUST be a single solid stroke.
- The person receiving the snap must be 2 yards behind the LOS when the snap ends.
- A disqualified player may remain in the team box area.

- The Two-Minute Warning **is not** a Timeout.
- An Unsporting foul may be used for a player who repeatedly is not legally equipped. (9.8.1h)

2026 Rule changes

1-1-3

All teams must begin a game with 7 players

2-18

Gives a definition of Hurdling. While it was a foul in the 2025 rule book it is now defined.

2-36-10, 3-4-3-1, 4-1-1, 8-3-9 exception, 8-4-3 exception

Gives a scoring team that is losing the opportunity to retain possession of the ball. There are very few special rules governing this. The scoring team may (if trailing in score) elect to keep possession of the ball. The scoring team would take possession on 4th down on its own 20-yard line. All rules, including timing, for a scrimmage down shall apply.

To be very clear, should the scoring team not achieve a 1st down on this play, their opponent will take possession of the ball at the dead-ball spot. (turnover on downs)

3-5-1

Increased the number of team timeouts to 3 per half. For CIF, this will include a change to something from last year. 3.4.4.e references the “two-minute warning”. In CIF last year, this was an optional additional timeout. For the 2026 season, **with 2:00 minutes remaining in each half**, the game clock will stop and start on the snap. **THIS IS NOT A TIME OUT!** Officials should tell both sidelines, the coach, and the captains that this is the two-minute warning, then indicate that the ball is ready for play.

4.1.1 & 8.5.5

After a safety, teams will now put the ball into play with a **scrimmage kick** from their own 20-yard line. All rules regarding scrimmage kicks apply. Treat this as a 4th-down play.

9.7.4

A ball in player possession shall not be batted, stripped, or attempted to be stripped....by either team. (Illegal kicking/batting, 10-yard penalty)

Case Play -

4.2.2 (clarification for spots following a fumble and backward pass)

CIF will continue to use the following regarding fumbles that first hit the ground in bounds, between the goal lines

Fumbles – The next spot will be the spot where possession was lost. The spot where the run ends. (2.36.8.b) (2.36.2)

Backward Pass – The dead-ball spot will be the spot where the ball contacts the ground. The spot where the ball becomes dead. (4.2.2.g.2) (7.4.3) (2.36.2)

Case plays editorial miss-

In Case Play 9.5, a 15-yard unsporting foul is mentioned. We believe this was a misprint. It will be a 10-yard foul. There are no 15-yard fouls in NFHS Flag Football.

The changes related to the Snapper are listed in Editorial Changes (7-1-2 and 7-1-3)

Rule 6 – Kicking the Ball

NFHS editorial change in 6.8 (the addition of “an effort to block a kick) is intended to make the blocking of a kick in or at the neutral zone ignored. Meaning, if a punt is blocked and then possessed by K the ball belongs to R at that spot. K may never advance a punt. K may only retain possession of the ball after a punt when all requirements for 6.6 are met.

This is a change from 2025, where a blocked punt (that did not cross the expanded neutral zone) could be possessed and advanced by K.

Point of Emphasis

Screen blocking is obstructing an opponent’s path without contact. To be legal, a position must be established with space and time for the opponent to reasonably change directions, and when the screener is moving, they will move in the same direction as the opponent.

Offensive players “swimming upstream” with a ball carrier behind them risk a foul, regardless of whether they are running a receiving route. Receivers lose their right to run a route when they come between the defense and a ball carrier. Once this occurs, they are subject to the screen-blocking rule.

Flags and Belts

It will be worn at the waist (the narrowest point) and will be tight enough not to shift during movement.

The flag will clearly contrast with the uniform shorts (pants). The uniform bottoms will be a single solid color to make the contrast apparent.

Officials have been instructed to conduct pregame equipment checks. These can be done during the warm-up period and do not require a lineup of the players. Officials will also ensure that all players' equipment is legal before each snap. Players who are not wearing their equipment in a way that is legal by rule will be removed from the field for one play.

Should the belt shift during play because of movement of the offensive player (ball carrier), a flag guarding penalty may be used.

Should the belt shift because of a failed attempt by the defense to pull a flag, the ball carrier remains live, and play will continue until the flag is pulled or officials determine there is a safety issue with the defensive attempts to pull a flag that is out of position.

When clothing covers or interferes with the defensive right to the flags, a flag-guarding penalty may be used.

Receiving the Snap

The requirements on the snapper have changed. The requirements on the person receiving the snap will be by rule (2 yards) behind the snapper. CIF interprets this as 2 yards behind the LOS.

Retaining possession after a score

The NFHS rulebook set a precedent that teams may change their declaration after a penalty, a charged team timeout, or a change of quarters. This will remain the same for retaining possession after a score. In all instances of changing the declaration, penalties will be enforced on the subsequent spot.

Field diagram for tournament play –

