CELEBRATING 30 YEARS 1996-2026

WHEELCHAIR FOOTBALL

2026-2027 RULEBOOK

American Association of adaptED SPORTS PROGRAMS

OFFICIAL AAASP INTERSCHOLASTIC WHEELCHAIR FOOTBALL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I: SAFETY AND CERTIFICATION 4
Required Certifications 4
Injury and Emergency Procedures 4
Serious Injuries 4
Head Injuries 4
Emergencies 4
PART II: THE GAME — OVERVIEW 5
Field of Play (see Appendix A for diagram) 5
Player Eligibility 5
The Ball 5
Player Equipment 5
Wheelchairs 5
PART III: GAME TIMING AND STRUCTURE 6
Game Duration 6
Play Clock 6
Game Clock Stoppages 6
Mercy Rule 6
Timeouts 6
PART IV: SCORING 6
Scoring Summary 6
Touchdown — 6 Points 7
Point After Touchdown (PAT) 7
Field Goal — 3 Points 7
Safety — 2 Points 7
PART V: DOWNS, KICKOFFS, AND OVERTIME 7
Downs 7
Kickoffs 7
Overtime 9
PART VI: FORMATIONS AND MOTION 9
The Neutral Zone 9
Offensive Formations (See Appendix B – Legal Offensive Formations) 9
Pre-Snap Motion 9
Defensive Formations (See Appendix C – Legal Defensive Formations) 9
PART VII: BALL HANDLING AND ADVANCEMENT 10
Passing 10
Running 10
Punting 10

© American Association of Adapted Sports Programs, Inc.

Fumbles 11
PART VIII: TACKLING AND BLOCKING 11
Legal Tackle 11
Legal Blocking 11
Illegal Blocking and Contact 11
PART IX: PENALTY ENFORCEMENT 11
General Principles 11
5-Foot Penalties 12
10-Foot Penalties 12
15-Foot Penalties 12
Spot Fouls and Special Penalties 13
Coach's Box Violations 13
PART X: OFFICIALS' DUTIES 13
Head Official (Referee / 'White Hat') 13
Line Judge 13
Back Judge 14
Fallen Player Safety 14
APPENDIX A – FIELD OF PLAY 15
APPENDIX B – LEGAL OFFENSIVE FORMATION 16
APPENDIX C – LEGAL DEFENSIVE FORMATION 17
APPENDIX D – OFFICIALS' SIGNALS 18
APPENDIX E – ABLE-BODIED RULE GUIDELINES FOR FOOTBALL 20

© American Association of Adapted Sports Programs, Inc.

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF ADAPTED SPORTS PROGRAMS

WHEELCHAIR FOOTBALL

OFFICIAL RULES

FOR AAASP GAME OFFICIALS AND COACHES

American Association of Adapted Sports Programs, Inc.

PART I: SAFETY AND CERTIFICATION

Required Certifications

Officials

- All officials must attend an in-person training before each sport season.
- All officials must register through DragonFly Max and submit a current background check every two (2) years. If there is no current background check available, use the following link to complete one: https://opportunities.averity.com/AAAEDSInc.

Coaches

- All new coaches must attend the in-person coaches training.
- All coaches returning coaches must participate in the coaches training, via Zoom.
- All coaches must complete the NFHS Learn courses: *Concussion in Sports, Sudden Cardiac Arrest* and *Protecting Students from Abuse*. All certificates of completion must be uploaded to DragonFly.

NOTE: AAASP strongly recommends CPR, AED, and First Aid training for all officials and coaches.

Injury and Emergency Procedures

Serious Injuries

- Officials and coaches must report serious injuries to AAASP staff immediately following the game.
- A Game Report form must be completed and submitted to the AAASP Director of Sports and/or the Coordinator of Sports within 24 hours.

Head Injuries

- Any potential head injury requires the immediate implementation of the established concussion protocol.

Emergencies

- In any emergency, call 911 immediately.
- All personnel must follow the school system's Emergency Action Plan.

© American Association of Adapted Sports Programs, Inc.

PART II: THE GAME — OVERVIEW

Field of Play (see Appendix A for diagram)

- The game is played indoor on a regulation high school basketball court.
- The court is divided into three equal sections by two first-down lines.
- Orange cones mark the end zones.
- The ball is always put into play at the center of the field's width.

Player Eligibility

- Eligible participants: students in grades 1–12 with a qualifying disability.
- Participants may walk unassisted, use mobility devices, or use manual or power wheelchairs.
- All participants must compete in a wheelchair during play.
- Competitors must not raise both hips simultaneously off the seat to gain advantage (catching, tackling, etc.).
- Raising one hip when reaching (to catch or tackle) is acceptable.

The Ball

- A youth-sized football is used. Contact AAASP for current specifications.

Player Equipment

- Helmets: A Virginia Tech 5-Star rated headband or soft-shelled helmet is required. AAASP recommends the GameBreaker Aura or GameBreaker Soft-Shell helmet.
- No jewelry is permitted.
- Medically necessary items must be securely covered with tape.

Wheelchairs

- Accepted: standard, sport, and power wheelchairs.
- Not accepted: motorized scooters or carts.

Required Safety Straps (all must be drawn taut):

  - Lap strap: over upper thighs or hips to prevent the player from falling out.
  - Achilles strap: behind the player's legs, within 6 inches of foot platforms, to prevent feet from falling off or being used as a brake.
  - Foot strap: secured over the top of the athlete's feet to the footplate, preventing standing or extending legs during play.
- Bungee cords are NOT permitted as safety straps.
- Foot platforms: the forward-most point cannot be more than 5 inches from the floor.
- Any horizontal bar or rear-extending push handles must be sufficiently padded.
- All wheelchair modifications are subject to officials' review for safety and fairness.

© American Association of Adapted Sports Programs, Inc.

PART III: GAME TIMING AND STRUCTURE

Game Duration

- Two 30-minute halves with a continuously running clock (see exceptions below).
- Halftime: 10 minutes (may be extended to 15 minutes for athletes/teams requiring additional time due to medical conditions).

Play Clock

- Varsity: 35-second play clock.
- Junior Varsity: 45-second play clock.

Administration: The head official sets the ball, steps behind the offensive line, and gives the 'ready for play' whistle to start the play clock, regardless of whether teams are set.

Game Clock Stoppages

The game clock runs continuously EXCEPT:

- Automatic stoppages: timeouts, injuries, or at officials' discretion.
- Last two minutes of the second half — clock also stops for:
  - An incomplete pass.
  - The ball goes out of bounds.
  - A first down is achieved.
- Penalties: clock stops and restarts when the official signals the play clock to begin.

Mercy Rule

If a team leads by 21 or more points during the last two minutes of the game:

- The game clock will not stop.
- The defensive team can no longer rush the quarterback or cross the line of scrimmage to tackle a player in the backfield.

Timeouts

- Each team: three one-minute timeouts per half.
- Timeouts do NOT carry over to the next half or overtime.
- In overtime: each team receives one timeout per overtime period.

PART IV: SCORING

Scoring Summary

SCORE TYPE	POINTS
Touchdown	**6**
PAT — 1-Point Kick Conversion	**1**
PAT — 2-Point Running/Passing Conversion	**2**
Field Goal	**3**
Safety	**2**

© American Association of Adapted Sports Programs, Inc.

Touchdown — 6 Points

- Manual Wheelchair: scored when ball carrier has possession and the ball breaks the plane of the goal line.
- Power Wheelchair: scored when at least one wheel touches or crosses the goal line. Possession is not required, but the ball must contact the athlete's wheelchair or body while within the field of play.

Point After Touchdown (PAT)

1-Point 'Kick' Conversion:

- Ball thrown ('kicked') through the vertical uprights of the basketball goal.
- Attempt made from the top of the free-throw circle.
- Offense must declare intent to 'kick.'

2-Point Conversion:

- Successful running or passing play into the end zone.
- Attempt made from the free-throw line.
- May be a pass or run from a scrimmage formation.

Field Goal — 3 Points

- Ball is kick-passed through the vertical uprights of the basketball goal from the field of play.
- Offense must declare intent to 'kick' — similar to a punt declaration.
- The defense may rush upon the snap.
- An unsuccessful attempt results in a dead ball; opposing team takes possession at the original line of scrimmage.

Safety — 2 Points

- Awarded to the defensive team when the offense is downed in its own end zone.

PART V: DOWNS, KICKOFFS, AND OVERTIME

Downs

- The offensive team has four downs to score or gain a first down.
- The field is divided into three sections by two first-down lines. Crossing a first-down line results in a new set of downs.

Kickoffs

- Varsity: kicks off from behind their own goal line.
- Junior Varsity: kicks off from behind the first-down marker on their side of the field.
- Receiving team must have at least two players at the midfield line.

Kickoff Results:

- Touchback: ball spotted at the free throw line (18 feet from the front end zone line).
- Out of bounds over sidelines: ball spotted at the free throw line, plus 5 additional feet.
- Receiving team has the option to advance the ball out of the end zone.

© American Association of Adapted Sports Programs, Inc.

Fair Catch:

- The receiving team's coach or captain may declare a fair catch before the kickoff.
- Ball is placed 8 feet from the front of the end zone to begin play.
- This decision can only be changed by calling a timeout.

On-Sides Kick Declaration:

During the final ten (10) minutes of the second half, a team that is trailing by eighteen (18) points or fewer may elect to attempt an Alternative Onside Kick by notifying the Referee before the kickoff. Upon notification, the Referee shall inform the receiving team before the play clock is started. The following procedures shall apply:

Section 1 – Formation and Ball Placement

1. The ball shall be placed on the kicking team's 15-yard line (free throw line).
2. Both teams shall line up in a standard scrimmage formation.
3. The kicking team shall be considered the offense, and the receiving team shall be considered the defense.
4. The line to gain shall be the kicking team's 30-yard line (1st down marker).

Section 2 – Attempt Requirements

1. The kicking team shall have one (1) down to reach or surpass the line to gain (1st down marker).
2. The line to gain may be reached by:
   a. An offensive play resulting in the ball being declared dead at or beyond the 30-yard line; or
   b. A defensive penalty that places the ball beyond the line to gain or awards an automatic first down.
3. If the kicking team reaches the line to gain, it shall retain possession and continue its offensive series from the spot where the ball is declared dead, with a new set of downs.
4. If the kicking team fails to reach the line to gain, possession shall be awarded to the receiving team at midfield (half court).

Section 3 – Prohibited Plays

The kicking team may not punt or attempt a field goal during an Alternative Onside Kick attempt for their first play. Any such play shall result in an immediate dead ball, and possession shall be awarded to the receiving team at the 50-yard line.

Section 4 – Change of Election

After declaring an Alternative Onside Kick, the kicking team may revert to a standard kickoff under either of the following circumstances:

1. The kicking team is granted a timeout before the snap and notifies the Referee of its intent to revert to a standard kickoff before the timeout expires; or
2. A penalty results in a replay of the down, and the kicking team notifies the Referee of its intent to revert to a standard kickoff before the ball is declared ready for play.

Section 5 – Timing Rules

1. Alternative Onside Kick attempts shall be governed by standard scrimmage-play timing rules.
2. During the final two (2) minutes of the second half, the game clock shall stop for:

   a. Incomplete passes;
   b. Plays ending out of bounds; and
   c. First downs, in accordance with normal timing rules.

© American Association of Adapted Sports Programs, Inc.

Section 6 – Multiple Attempts

A team may not attempt another Alternative Onside Kick until the opposing team has had an opportunity to possess the ball following the previous attempt.

Overtime

If tied at end of regulation, the NCAA tie-breaker system is used:

- Coin toss determines possession or which end to use. Visiting team calls the toss.
- Each team gets a possession starting at the opponent's three-point line, with four downs to score.

PAT Attempts:

  - First two overtime periods: teams may attempt a 1- or 2-point PAT.
  - Third overtime and beyond: all teams must attempt a 2-point PAT.

- The team with the most points after an equal number of overtime series wins.
- If a touchdown is scored that guarantees a win, the PAT is not attempted.

PART VI: FORMATIONS AND MOTION

The Neutral Zone

- A neutral zone runs the width of the field, separating offensive and defensive lines at the line of scrimmage.
- Neither team may line up in the neutral zone.

Offensive Formations (See Appendix B – Legal Offensive Formations)

Legal Offensive Formation Requirements:

- Minimum three players on the line of scrimmage at the snap.
- Offensive linemen cannot have any part of their wheelchair beyond the line of scrimmage.

Center Alignment Options:

  - Forward: front casters must be behind the line of scrimmage.
  - Reverse/Sideways: large wheels must be behind the line of scrimmage.

Backfield:

- Backfield players must be positioned far enough behind the line to avoid wheelchairs becoming entangled at the start of the play.
- In the 'I'-formation, the QB may position to the rear of the center (forward, sideways, or reverse), as long as the foot platform does not overlap or is tangent to the rear-most portion of the center's chair.

Pre-Snap Motion

- Legal: one player may be in lateral motion (parallel to the line of scrimmage) at the snap.
- Illegal: no player may be in forward motion toward the line of scrimmage at the snap. A player in motion moving toward the line must come to a complete stop before the ball is snapped.

Defensive Formations (See Appendix C – Legal Defensive Formations)

- Minimum two players on the line of scrimmage.
- Defensive team may rush the quarterback and cross the line of scrimmage as soon as the ball is snapped.
- Defenders CANNOT rush or push through an offensive player — they must go around.
- Failure results in a 15-foot unsportsmanlike conduct penalty.

© American Association of Adapted Sports Programs, Inc.

> *NOTE: See Mercy Rule (Page 5-6): during the last 2 minutes when a team leads by 21+, the defense may no longer rush the QB or cross the line to tackle a player in the backfield.*

PART VII: BALL HANDLING AND ADVANCEMENT

Passing

- All six offensive players are eligible to receive a pass.
- Only one forward pass is allowed per down, thrown from behind the line of scrimmage.

Power Wheelchair Reception:

- A powerchair player is considered to have 'caught' a pass if the ball strikes them or their wheelchair before touching the ground.
- A powerchair user does not have to retain possession to advance play.
- This also applies to interceptions.
- On a touch/handoff, the quarterback has to instantly drop the ball. Failure to do so results in a unsportsmanlike penalty.

Manual Chair Reception:

- A manual chair player catches a pass upon maintaining possession of the ball while advancing play.
- The ball may be held in the hands or placed in the athlete's lap, provided control is maintained throughout.

Fumbles and Ball Theft:

- When the ball is fumbled (dropped), it is immediately ruled dead. The team that last had possession retains the ball at the spot of the fumble.
- An opponent cannot steal the ball from a player's lap — this is an unsportsmanlike act and results in a penalty.

Running

- Rushing plays are legal and may be initiated with a handoff or pitch.
- Dropped handoff/pitch: play is over; ball spotted where it touched the floor.
- Power Wheelchair Handoff: the quarterback must immediately drop the ball to the floor. Failure to do so is an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty.

Punting

- Punts are simulated by a forward pass.
- The offense must declare intent to punt in time for the defense to adjust. The official will signal a 'kicking play.' The center snap is not permitted until the defense is ready.

Punt Ball Outcomes:

  - Ball hits a building structure: dead ball. Placed either one foot before the first-down line on the receiving team's side, or at the spot where it hit the structure. Receiving team chooses.
  - Ball goes out of bounds: spotted where it went out of bounds.
  - Ball goes into the end zone: touchback; ball spotted 18 feet from the front of the end zone (free throw line).
  - Punts may be fielded in the air or on a bounce.
  - If the ball contacts a power wheelchair user (air or bounce), the powerchair user is considered to have possession at the point of contact.

© American Association of Adapted Sports Programs, Inc.

- If the ball contacts a manual wheelchair and the athlete fails to maintain possession before the ball contacts the ground, the ball is declared dead at the point of contact.

Fumbles

- When the ball is fumbled, it is dead. The last team with possession retains the ball.
- An opponent cannot steal the ball from a player's lap — unsportsmanlike conduct penalty.
- A player who falls out of their chair with the ball retains possession; play stops where they fall.

PART VIII: TACKLING AND BLOCKING

Legal Tackle

A tackler must be seated in their chair during the tackle.

- Manual Wheelchair Carrier: tackle made by placing one hand on the ball carrier's body between the knee and shoulder.
- Power Wheelchair Carrier: tackle made by placing one hand on the ball carrier's body (above the knees) or on their wheelchair.
- Holding: illegal to grab an opponent or their chair before a tackle.
- Unnecessary Roughness: forcibly shoving a player during a tackle is not allowed.

Legal Blocking

- Frontal Blocking: blocking or colliding with another chair from the front is legal. Contact from the offensive player's footplate must be in front of the defensive player's rear axle.
- Power Wheelchair Control: power wheelchair players must always be in control and cannot run into other chairs at full force to block.
- Chair Positioning (Manual): all four wheels must remain on the ground. 'Tilting' onto two wheels to gain an advantage is not allowed.

Illegal Blocking and Contact

- Illegal Push: an offensive player cannot continuously push a defender backward or sideways.
- Clipping: blocking an opponent from the rear, making contact with the large wheels or anti-tip casters, is illegal.
- Holding (Blocking): illegal to 'lock' chairs by keeping a foot plate in the spokes of another chair.
- Locked Chairs: if two chairs become locked and unable to move, players must mutually break contact and resume play. This is the only time a player may lay a hand on another player's chair.

PART IX: PENALTY ENFORCEMENT

General Principles

- All accepted penalties are enforced from the line of scrimmage unless otherwise noted.
- Accepted penalties result in a replay of the down, except for fouls with a 'loss of down' provision.
- Half the Distance: no penalty can be enforced for more than half the distance from the enforcement spot to the offending team's goal line.
- Dead Ball Fouls: fouls such as offsides or illegal procedure result in an immediate whistle; play is stopped before it begins.

© American Association of Adapted Sports Programs, Inc.

5-Foot Penalties

FOUL	ENFORCEMENT	NOTES
Offsides	5 ft from LOS	Dead Ball Foul
Illegal Motion	5 ft from LOS	
Delay of Game	5 ft from LOS	
Illegal Procedure	5 ft from LOS	
Illegal Substitution	5 ft from LOS	

- Offsides: player in neutral zone when ball is snapped.
- Illegal Motion: player moving forward toward the line of scrimmage at the snap.
- Delay of Game: offense fails to snap before play clock expires.
- Illegal Procedure: includes improper punt declaration or other procedural violations.
- Illegal Substitution: a player leaves the field and returns without participating in the play.

10-Foot Penalties

FOUL	ENFORCEMENT	NOTES
Holding (Offensive)	10 ft from LOS	
Holding (Defensive)	10 ft from point of infraction	
Illegal Use of Hands	10 ft	

- Holding (Offensive): illegally grabbing or obstructing a defender; enforced 10 feet from LOS.
- Holding (Defensive): illegally grabbing or obstructing an offensive player; enforced 10 feet from point of infraction.
- Illegal Use of Hands: using hands or arms to 'stiff-arm' or 'hack' an opponent.

15-Foot Penalties

FOUL	ENFORCEMENT	NOTES
Clipping	15 ft from point of infraction	
Illegal Participation	15 ft	
Unsportsmanlike Conduct	15 ft; 2nd offense = ejection	

- Clipping: blocking an opponent from behind.
- Illegal Participation: player leaves field and returns to make a catch or tackle.

Unsportsmanlike Conduct (15 ft; 2nd offense = ejection). Examples include:

- Attempting to steal the ball from a player's lap.
- Intentionally falling out of a chair to stop play.
- Using vulgar language or deliberately trying to harm another player or official.
- Defensive player rushing through (not around) an offensive player.
- Any other act deemed unsportsmanlike by an official.

© American Association of Adapted Sports Programs, Inc.

Spot Fouls and Special Penalties

Pass Interference — Defensive:

- Illegal contact on a receiver beyond 5 yards from the line of scrimmage while ball is in the air.
- Illegal contact includes: from the side (perpendicular), side by side, straight on.
- Enforcement: ball placed at the spot of the foul; offense awarded automatic first down.

Pass Interference — Offensive:

- Illegally contacting a defender to prevent an interception.
- Enforcement: 15-foot penalty from previous LOS + loss of down.

Illegal Forward Pass:

- A pass thrown after the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage.
- Enforcement: 5-foot penalty from spot of pass + loss of down.

Intentional Grounding:

- A forward pass thrown to an area with no receiver to avoid a loss of yardage.
- Enforcement: 5-foot penalty from spot of pass + loss of down.

Coach's Box Violations

Coaches must remain within the delineated coach's box (14 to 28 feet from the end line).

WARNING	CONSEQUENCE
1st	All coaches must remain seated in the box
2nd	5-foot penalty
3rd	15-foot penalty
4th	15-foot penalty + ejection of head coach

PART X: OFFICIALS' DUTIES

Games are officiated by a team of three: Head Official (Referee), Line Judge, and Back Judge.

Head Official (Referee / 'White Hat')

Position: behind the offensive backfield.

Responsibilities:

- Administer the ball before the snap.
- Start the play clock with the 'ready for play' signal.
- Watch for fouls in the offensive backfield (holding, illegal blocks, etc.).
- Has final authority on all rulings.

Line Judge

Position: on the sideline at the line of scrimmage.

Responsibilities:

- Mark the line of scrimmage with a beanbag.
- Rule on pre-snap fouls: offsides, illegal motion.
- Watch for holding and other fouls at the line of scrimmage.
- Assist in determining if a first down has been achieved.

© American Association of Adapted Sports Programs, Inc.

Back Judge

Position: behind the defensive backfield.

Responsibilities:

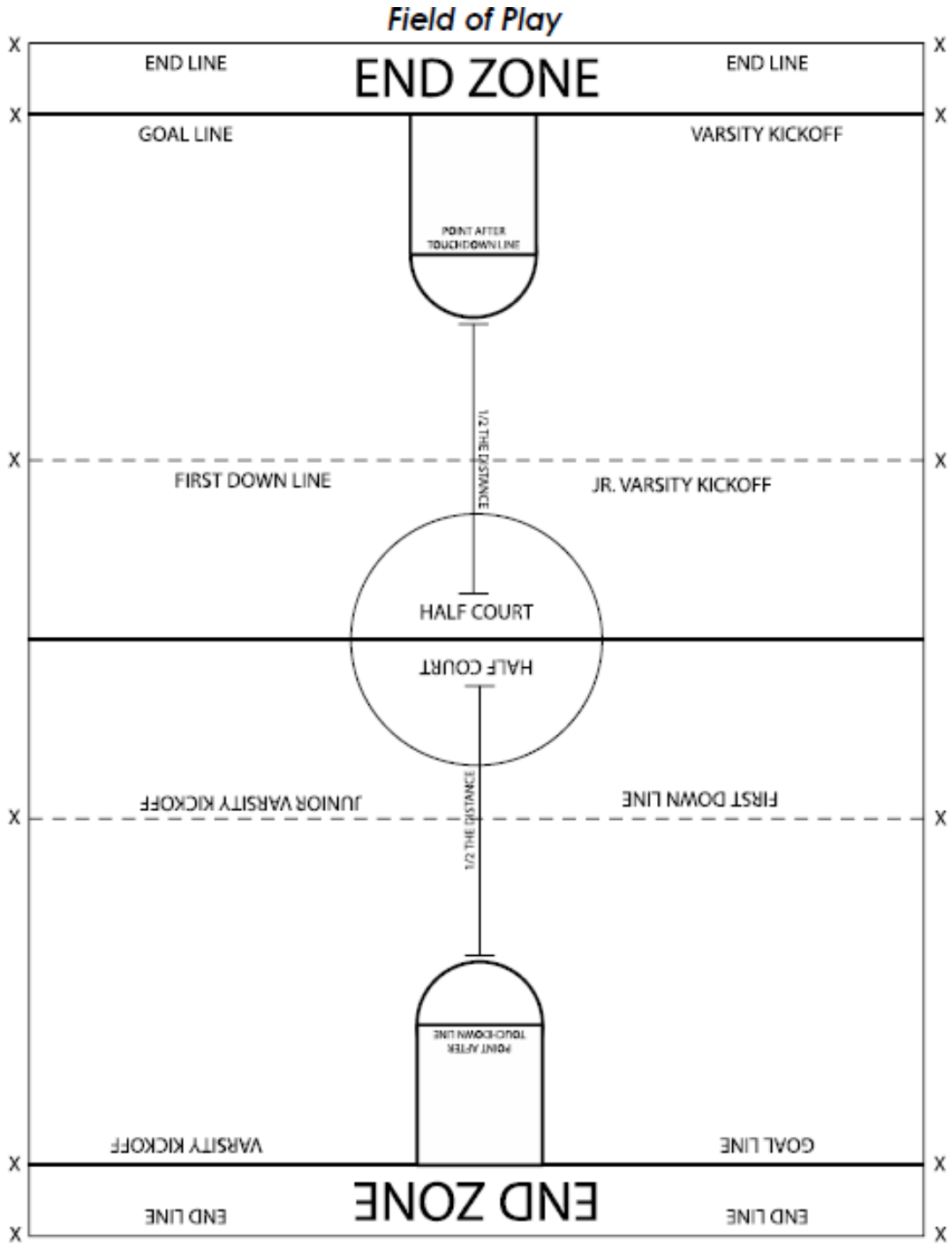
- Keep track of the down and the play clock.
- Rule on fouls committed by the defense: pass interference, holding.
- Watch for illegal contact in the secondary.

Fallen Player Safety

- It is the duty of ALL officials and players to ensure the safety of a player who has fallen out of their chair.
- If an official determines a fallen player is in danger, they will blow the whistle TWICE to stop play immediately.
- The ball is spotted where it was when the whistle was blown.

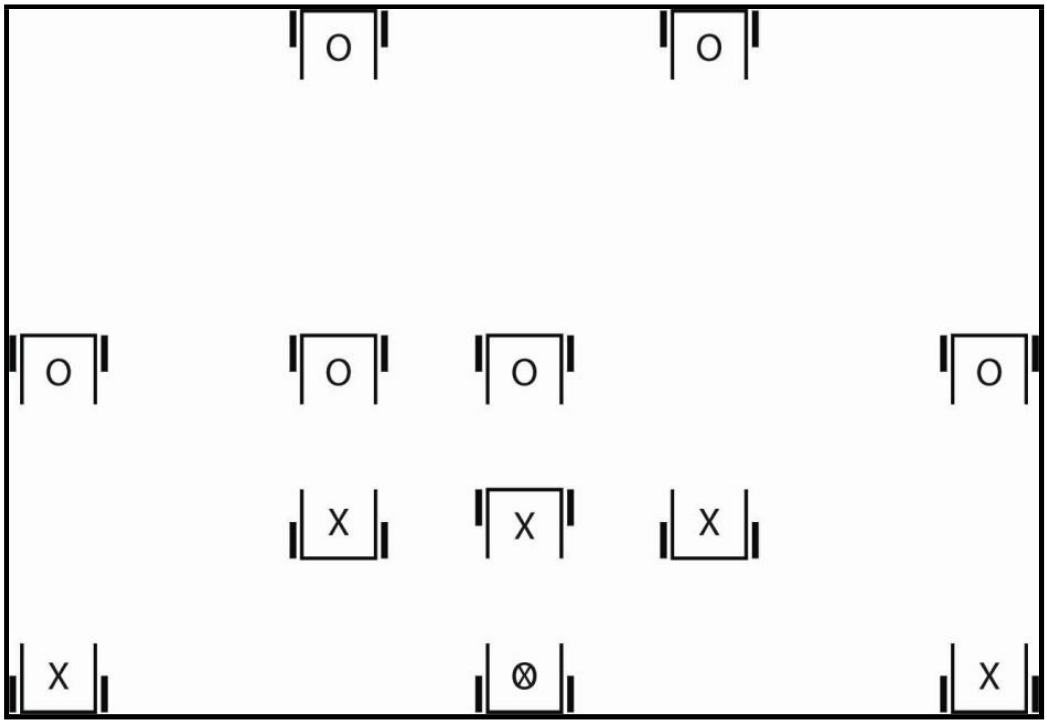
© American Association of Adapted Sports Programs, Inc.

APPENDIX A – FIELD OF PLAY



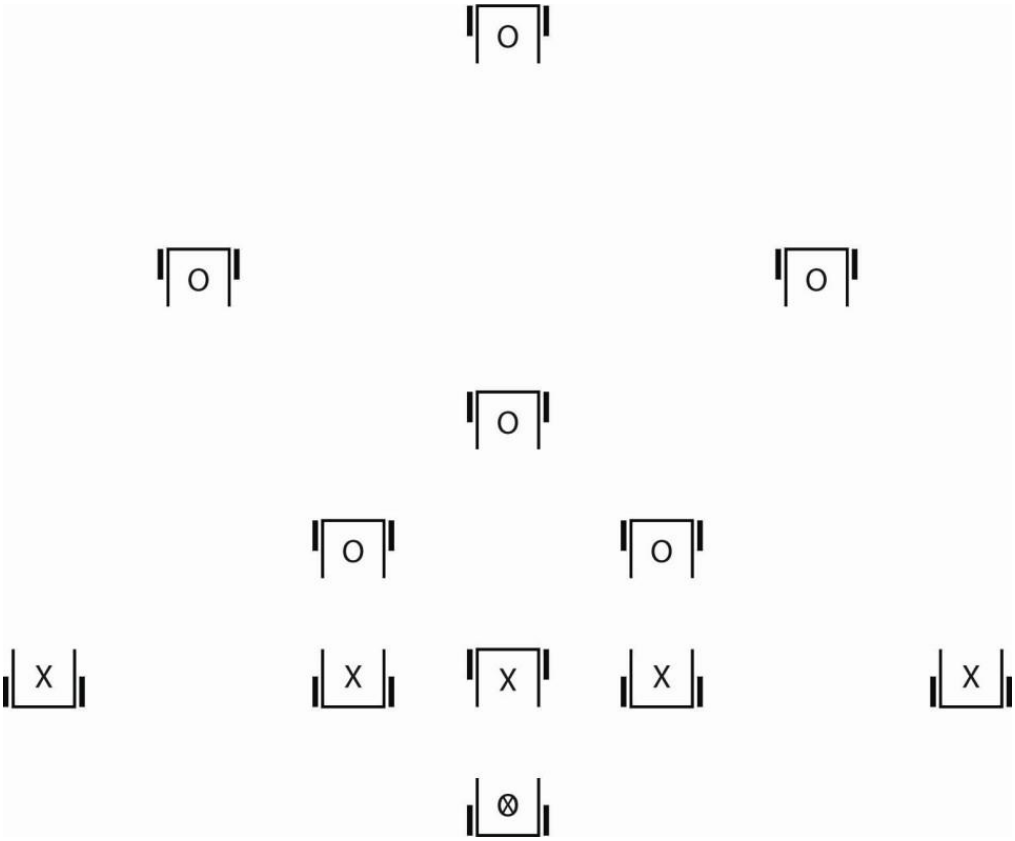
X = ORANGE CONE PLACEMENT

APPENDIX B – LEGAL OFFENSIVE FORMATION



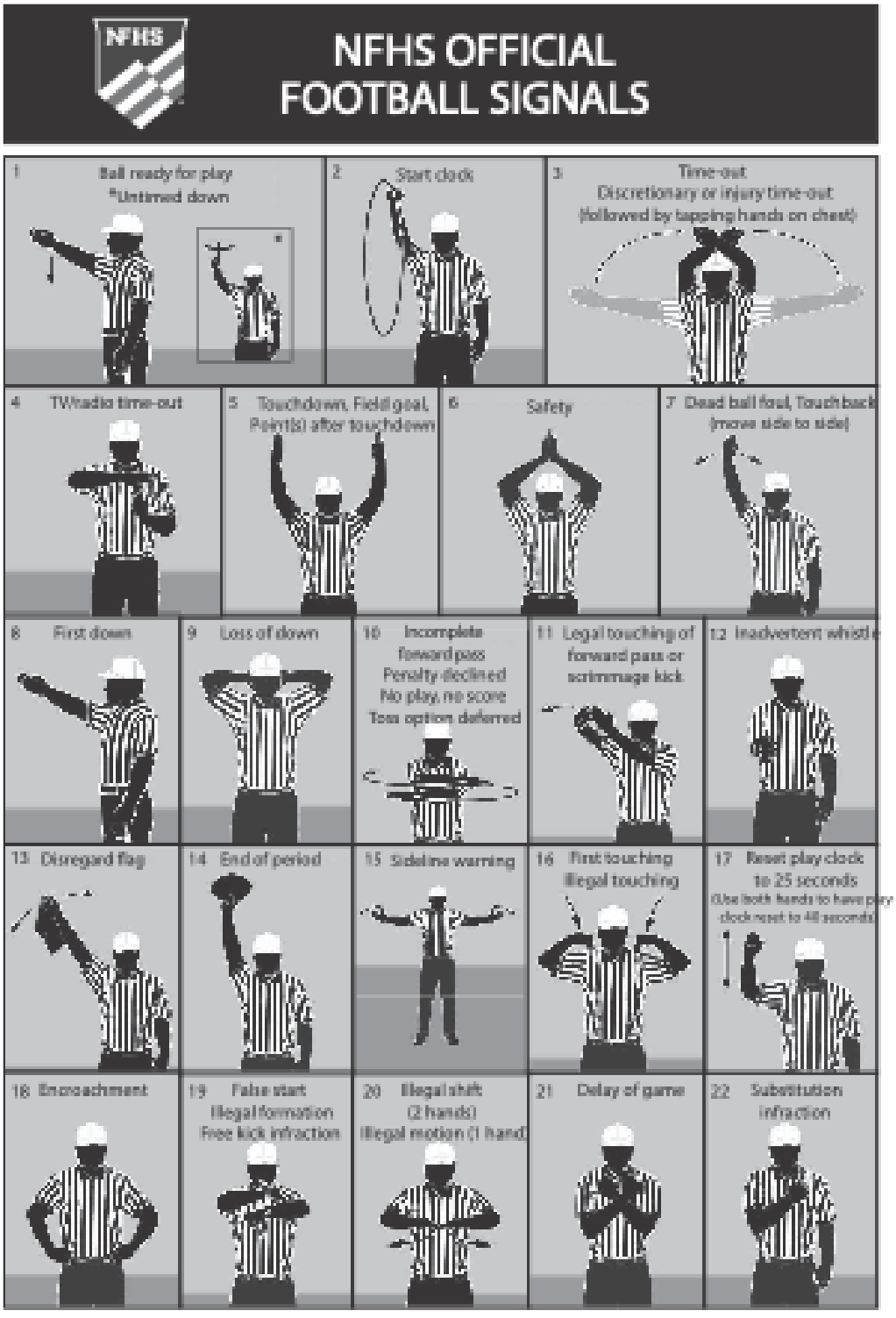
© American Association of Adapted Sports Programs, Inc.

APPENDIX C – LEGAL DEFENSIVE FORMATION

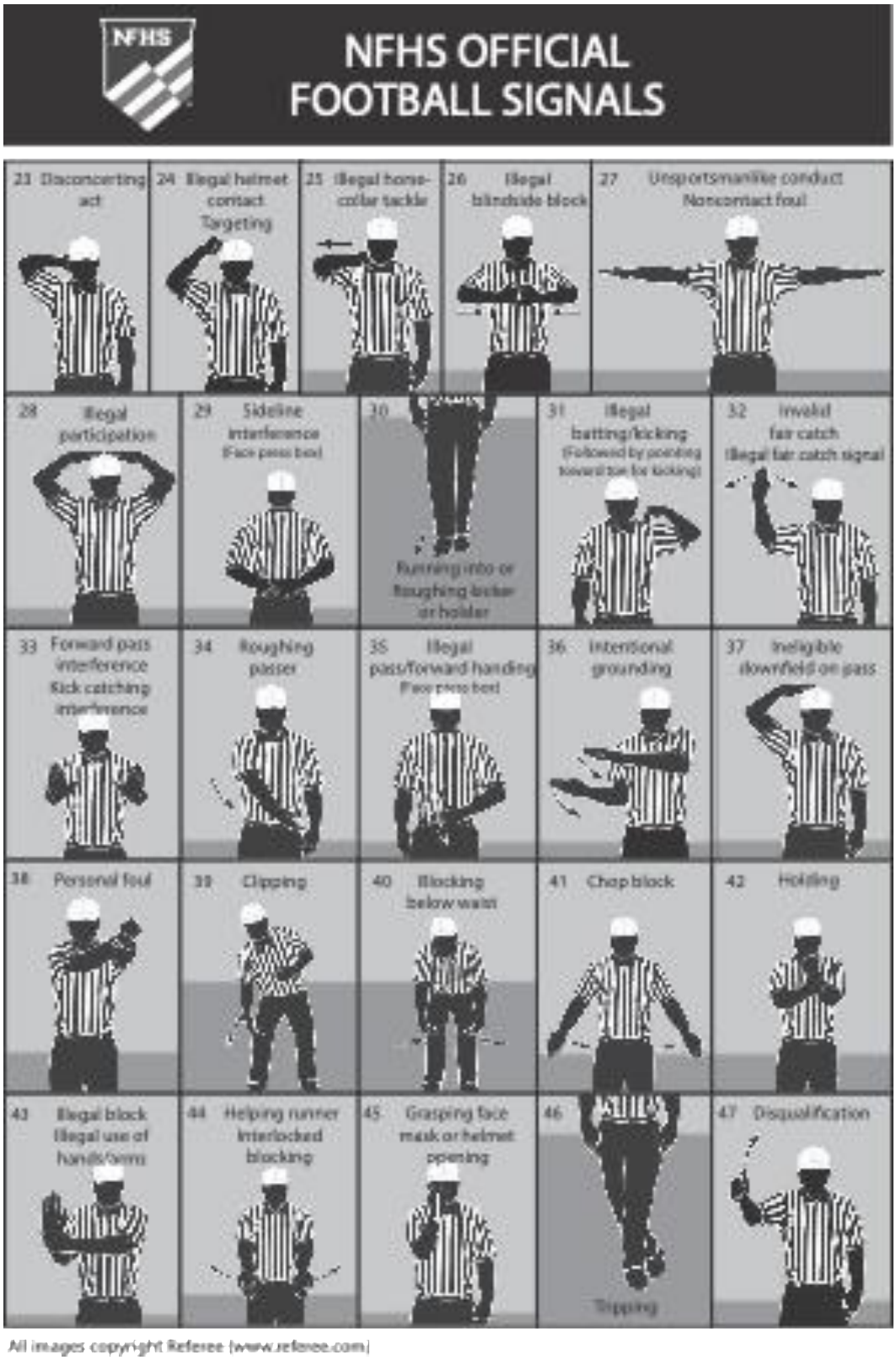


© American Association of Adapted Sports Programs, Inc.

APPENDIX D – OFFICIALS' SIGNALS



All images copyright Referee (www.referee.com)



All images copyright Referee (www.referee.com)

APPENDIX E – ABLE-BODIED RULE GUIDELINES FOR FOOTBALL

Able-Bodied Player Participation Guidelines – Football

Roster Eligibility
An able-bodied (AB) player may be added to a team roster under the following conditions:

- **Handball and Football**: The team has **6 or fewer** players.
- **Basketball**: The team has **5 or fewer** players.

If a team meets the **minimum number of eligible players**, the AB player **may not start the game**. The AB player may only be used as a **substitute** after the **first quarter (basketball)** or **first period (handball/football)**.

Uniform Requirements

- AB players **must compete in a wheelchair**.
- AB players **must wear a contrasting vest or uniform color** to ensure they are easily identifiable.

Role and Restrictions

- The AB player serves as an **assist player only**.
- The AB player **may not score** or **dominate the game** in any way.
- The AB player should not have a **significant impact** on the outcome of the game

Offensive Restrictions

- AB players **may block**.
- AB players **may NOT play the positions** of:
    - Quarterback
    - Running back
    - Wide receiver

Defensive Guidelines

- AB players must **begin each play** lined up as a **defensive lineman**.
- If the **offensive lineman** they are lined up against becomes an **eligible receiver** and releases downfield:
    - The AB player may **follow** and **defend that player only**.
- AB players **may NOT line up against** or defend a **wide receiver**.

Passing Situations

- AB players **may raise their hands** to attempt to **block or deflect passes**.
- AB players **may NOT intercept** passes.
    - If an AB player catches a pass, it will be ruled an **incomplete pass**, not an interception.

© American Association of Adapted Sports Programs, Inc.

Rushing the Quarterback

- AB players **may not rush** the quarterback or **cross the line of scrimmage at the snap**.
- However, they **may pursue and tackle** the quarterback **after he crosses the line of scrimmage**.

Tackling

- AB players are permitted to **make tackles** on **any player who has crossed the line of scrimmage**.

Violation Procedure & Penalties

- **First Offense**: Warning + **5-foot penalty**
- **Second Offense**: Warning + **15-foot penalty**
- **Third & Subsequent Offenses**: **15-foot penalty**

© American Association of Adapted Sports Programs, Inc.