2018 Vermont Principals’ Association
Middle School Football Rules

Definition of Playing Terms
a. Fumbles: Losing the ball after having possession.
b. Muffs: Receiving the ball without possession. The initial touching of the ball when receiving a kickoff
c. LOS: Line of scrimmage
d. POI: Point of Infraction

A. Field
a. The flag field measures 40 Yards by 80 Yards (recommended)
b. If needed a full-size field can be used

B. Equipment
. Each player must wear:
   a. helmet with a face guard, shoulder pads, mouthpiece, properly padded football pants, jersey with the color of their team, belt and flags provided by the league
   b. No metal spiked shoes permitted. Rubber cleats are okay
   c. No jewelry will be allowed to be worn by players during games.

B. Pregame activities
. Officials will conduct a thorough check of equipment before the game and at the start of the second half.
a. Check that flags release properly and jerseys should not cover the flags (flags must be easily accessible)
b. All teams must submit a roster indicating jersey number, name, and weight of each player. Weigh-ins take place on registration night.
c. All team players should start on either offense or defense
   d. Teams may have between 7 and 11 men on the field; each team must have the same number of players.

C. Game Time
   a. Stop Time- The final minute of the first half and the final minute of the game is "stop time".
      i. Clock is stopped at one minute, and both teams warned.
      ii. There is NO Stop Time if one team is ahead by 21 points.
      iii. Clock stops for:
          1. Incomplete passes
          2. Out of bounds plays
          3. Touchdowns and Safeties
          4. Change of possession and restarts at the snap
          5. On first down, the clock stops until chains are reset on sideline then is restarted
          6. On a kickoff, the clock starts when the offensive team touches the ball and stops at the completion of the return. The clock restarts at the snap of the first offensive play.
          7. Accepted Penalties, clock restarts if a penalty is declined
          8. Time Outs (Both Team and Official time outs)
          9. Injury Time, when called by an official
   a. Half-time- 10 minutes between halves; there is no time out between quarters
   b. Time Out- Each team is allowed two time-outs per half. Any player or coach may call time out. Time outs are one minute.
   c. Injuries The referee may stop play for injuries, repairing equipment, or calm discussion of calls.
      a. An injured player must leave the game for one play or his team will be charged a time-out.
i. During these stops both teams must stay on field.

d. **Huddle time** - is a maximum of 25 seconds.
   . A first infraction will be warned; subsequent infractions are a 5 Yard penalty.
   i. Grades 5-6: No penalty if team has broken huddle within 25 seconds after ball spotted.
   ii. Grades 7-8, ball must be snapped within 30 seconds from spot.
   iii. 5th & 6th grade coaches may be on the field with their teams at all times.
   iv. 7th and 8th grade coaches may be on the field with their teams only during the first two games of the season.

e. **Scoring and 21 Point Rule**
   a. Touchdown- six points
   b. Point After
   i. one point- run or pass from 2 ½ Yards
   ii. two points- run or pass from 5 Yards
   c. Safety- two points
   i. spot after the Safety is at the 35 Yard line (same as high school).
   d. Mercy Rule: Teams leading by 21 points (or more)
   i. Any of the Mercy Rules may be discarded if both coaches agree.

E. **Playing Rules and Regulations**
   a. **Official whistle** stops all plays. If an inadvertent whistle is blown and a player’s flags are still on, the offense has the choice of having the ball at the point of the whistle, or a replay of the down.
   b. **Kickoff**: Winner of coin toss has a choice of starting on offense, or defense, choice of goals or deferring to the second half. The other team has the remaining choices.
   c. **Ball Carriers: Stiff Arms, Out of Bounds, Flags, Knee, Falling, Loss of Flags, Advancement**
   i. A stiff arm by a ball carrier is legal. Note: Guarding the flag is still illegal.
   ii. If one Foot (or Knee, or Elbow) land in bounds prior to a player going out of bounds, then the catch is considered Inbounds
   iii. If the ball carrier loses his flags without contact (e.g. the flags just fall off), the runner is not down
   iv. If the player’s knee touches the ground or he falls while his flags are on, he is down by contact and the play will be blown dead.
   v. When advancement of a ball carrier is stopped, the play will be blown dead.
   vi. A ball carrier cannot leave their feet to advance the ball.
   vii. If the referee determines that a ball carrier is in an unsafe position, he may whistle the play dead.

d. **Fumbles- 5th and 6th Grade Level**
   . If there is a fumble on plays from scrimmage, the ball is dead as soon as it hits the ground.
   i. A “stripped” ball is treated as a fumble not as an interception.
   ii. A dropped snap from Center. The ball is dead and is returned to the LOS with loss of down. Exception: Punt Snap. If a punt snap is dropped, the punter may pick the ball up and kick it. (There is no rush on a punt)
   iii. Any ball caught in the air (fumble or pass) is a live ball and may be advanced.
   iv. On Kickoffs, the ball is dead for the kicking team, it may not be recovered.
   v. The receiving team may recover its own muffs and advance the ball.

e. **Blocking-** double-team blocking is permitted either from a running or stationary position.
   . High school hand contact rules apply (blockers should have open hands), no blocking below the waist or from behind. (Illegal block: 10 Yard penalty)

f. **Players and substitutes**
   . Unlimited substitution is allowed.
   i. **Sportsmanship**- It is expected that coaches will be good sportsmen and not "run up the score".
F. Rules of Alignment
   a. Defensive Line:
      i. In 7 man play, the defense must have 3 men on the LOS and ONLY 3 men.
      ii. In 8 or 9 man play, the defense must have 4 men on the LOS and ONLY 4 men.
      iii. In 10 or 11 man play, the defense must have 5 men on the LOS and ONLY 5 men.
      iv. Linebackers must be at least two Yards off the ball. Exception: If a team is backed up inside their own 2 Yard line, the linebackers may have their heels on the goal line rather than in the end zone.
   b. Offensive Line:
      i. In 7 man teams the offense must have a minimum of 4 men on LOS
      ii. In 8 or 9 man teams the offense must have a minimum of 5 men on LOS
      iii. In 10 man teams the offense must have a minimum of 6 men on LOS
      iv. In 11 man teams the offense must have a minimum of 7 men on LOS
   c. Passing the Ball - eligible pass receivers are the end players on the LOS and backfield men.
      i. Centers and guards may not go more than 2 Yards beyond the LOS until ball is passed (5 Yard penalty).
   d. Punting
      i. 5th and 6th Grade Level:
         1. No punting at this level
         2. In place of a punt, the ball will be moved 20 Yards down field.
         3. The deepest the ball can be spotted is the opponent's 20 Yard line.
      ii. 7th and 8th Grade Level
         1. When a team wants to punt, it must declare its intention to the referee who will inform the other team.
         2. Both the punting and receiving team must remain on the LOS until the ball is punted
         3. If the snap is dropped, punter may pick up the ball still execute the kick.
         4. There is no rushing of the punter, no movement until the ball is kicked
         5. The punter must be at least 7 Yards deep
         6. The snap must be through the Center's legs
         7. There is no advancement of the ball by the receiver after catch of the punt.
   e. Penalties
      • Officials are encouraged to practice “preventive officiating”.
        Example: Warning players to get out of the neutral zone, not on LOS, etc.
      1. Offense- regular NFHS rules with the addition of h, l, m
         a. Charging- ball carrier initiates contact with defender, (Especially prohibited - contact with helmet or shoulders) -10 Yards POI
         b. Guarding of flag or belt is spotted at POI
         c. Leaving one’s feet is at the POI
      2. Defense
         b. Tackle- An action where the intent of stopping the advance of the ball carrier is other than pulling the flag or pushing out of bounds. 10 Yards POI
            Examples of Tackles:
            • Taking the ball carrier to the ground and no attempt is made to pull the flag.
            • Missing the flag, but the subsequent action wraps up a player legs or feet taking them to the ground.
            • Grabbing the ball carrier’s jersey and pulling the player to the ground
            Examples of legally stopping a ball carrier, but the flags were not pulled:
            • Pushing a ball carrier near the sideline out of bounds.
            • Getting blocked into the ball carrier and the ball carrier falls to the ground.
• The ball carrier trips over another player, or themselves, during an attempt to pull the flags.
• Attempting to impede a ball carrier’s progress to enable pulling a flag and the ball carrier falls to the ground.

Previous version: Tackle: stopping advance of ball carrier by any means other than pulling flag belt.

2. Team:

   a. Unsportsmanlike conduct-
      i. Spiking, trash talk, throwing the flag, swearing, altering a flag belt, hitting out of bounds, etc.-10 Yards POI
      ii. Flagrant tackling and flagrant charging is considered unsportsmanlike. An additional 10-Yard penalty and / or first down (or loss of down) may be incurred at the discretion of the referees.
      iii. Coaches are responsible for the conduct of their players, parents, fans and chain gang and any may be penalized for unsportsmanlike conduct. 10 Yards- LOS. Coaches are encouraged to review this rule with parents and fans prior to game play.
      iv. Officials may remove a player for a series of downs before ejecting a player for unsportsmanlike conduct or unnecessary roughness.
      v. If a player receives 2 unsportsmanlike infractions in a game or one call in two successive games, the player will be suspended from play for 4 consecutive quarters from the point of the second infraction.