



## **JDL Football Rules**

With several notable exceptions identified herein, JDL Football is played in accordance with established youth football rules contained in the National Federation of State High School Association (NFHS) rulebook.

Any discussion of playing rules should consider the JDL Football philosophy and its unique coaching approach. It should be remembered that JDL Football coaches are coaching both competing teams and in most JDL divisions, they also serve as referees. As a result, the role of the referee is less adversarial and also less consequential. The referee serves as another coach on the field with the dual task of mentoring while maintaining a "level" playing field for the competing teams.

Since not all volunteer youth football coaches are well versed in the NFHS rule book or may not have access to the NFHS rule book, this condensed JDL Football rule book provides a simple, basic set of playing rules for use in JDL Football games. It has been designed to complement the goals and objectives of Junior Development League Football. Local JDL Football league commissioners may expand or modify this simplified rulebook as appropriate to suit the needs of the local organization's football program and personnel.

A basic understanding of the of the game and its general rules of play is assumed and includes the following fundamental elements of the game:

- 11 players on the field per team
- 7 offensive players on the line of scrimmage
- The offense has 4 downs to make 10 yards and a first down

Areas where the JDL Football playing rules depart from NFHS rules include the assessment of penalties, scoring for extra points, game timing, special teams play on kickoffs, punts, field goals and extra points. These JDL unique situations are discussed in detail in the following pages.

### **The Ball**

The league commissioner determines the size and type of ball used in each division. It is recommended that the younger divisions use a smaller ball and older divisions use a larger ball.

### **The Field**

The dimensions of the playing field are determined by the league commissioner. Full size, 100-yard by 55-yard fields are recommended but younger divisions may play on smaller fields as determined by the league commissioner and local field availability. Goal posts and 10-yard end zones are considered the minimum standard for all levels of play.

### **Equipment**

All players must be outfitted with a full set of properly fitted equipment including a helmet, shoulder pads, pants, hip, butt, thigh and knee pads, athletic shoes with molded cleats and a mouth piece. Players are issued contrasting jerseys and wear the appropriate color based on their team assignment for a given game.

### **Formations**

Local JDL Football commissioners are encouraged to keep offensive and defensive formations simple and basic until players have mastered the basic formations, associated skills and fundamental techniques. It is recommended that JDL Football coaches teach the 6-3-2 defense and only move to variations such as 5-4-2 or 4-4, 4-3 etc when players gain experience in the basic formations. The 6-3 defense is preferred, especially at the younger levels of play because it simplifies offensive blocking assignments. Blitzing by linebackers and defensive backs is not permitted. Linebackers must line up 3 yards off the line of scrimmage and defensive backs 6 yards of the line of scrimmage. Players in these positions should be taught to read and react. Blitzing techniques may be introduced in middle school divisions as deemed appropriate and authorized by the league commissioner. Offensive formations taught include the basic straight T-formation and variations including the Shotgun, I-formation and spread formations as determined by the local league. Five receivers are eligible in these offensive formations. In considering offensive and defensive formations, the focus should always be on teaching and mastering basic fundamental football techniques before introducing more advanced techniques.

### **Special Teams**

Kickoffs, kickoff returns and punt returns are permitted only in the older divisions if deemed appropriate and authorized by the league commissioner. Free kicks and/or limited rushes are used on kicked extra points, field goal attempts and punts—again as determined by the league commissioner. The team scoring the safety will put the ball in play from its own 40-yard line.

### **Game Timing/Duration**

JDL Football games are 50 minutes in duration using a running clock. The game consists of two 25 minute halves with a 10 minute intermission. Games must start within 5 minutes of the schedule start time.

### **Starting a Game**

A coin toss is used to determine which team will start on offense. The coin toss will be made at least 10 minutes prior to the scheduled start of the game. Kickoffs are not typically used in the younger divisions. Instead the offensive team puts the ball in play at its 40-yard line. The league commissioner determines whether kickoffs and kickoff returns are to be used and in which division. If kickoffs are employed the ball is kicked from the kicking team's 40-yard line. The running clock starts when the referee blows his whistle. Time is kept on the field by the referee and is only stopped in the event of a significant injury or scheduled water break.

### **Starting the Second Half**

The team that started the first half on defense will get the ball to start the second half. The same rules for kickoffs as described above apply.

### **Starting and Stopping the Clock**

In JDL football the play clock stops only for water breaks, player injuries, half-time intermission and the end of the game.

### **Dead Time**

Dead Time is an innovative JDL Football concept designed to insure that the players on the field determine the outcome of the game, not some aspect of clock management.

If one team is ahead by more than a touchdown including the extra point, the game is over after 50 minutes has expired. If however, at the 48 minute point of the game (ie 2 minutes left to play), the game score is within one touchdown including the point after attempt, then the game is considered to be in Dead Time. The team that has possession of the ball at the beginning of dead time continues play until they score, turn over the ball on a fumble or on downs. If they have the leading score going into dead time and they score, the game is over. If they are trailing in the score and do not score they game is over. If they are trailing in score and score, the opponent gets the ball and continues to play until they score, turn over the ball on a fumble or on downs.

#### **Dead Time Example–Scenario 1**

Team A is winning by a touchdown, team B is losing. Team A has possession of the ball when entering Dead Time. If Team A scores the game is over and Team A wins. If Team B stops Team A from scoring they get the ball and get a change to score. If Team B does not score the game is over and Team A wins. If Team B scores and Team B's score is higher than Team A, Team B wins.

#### **Dead Time Example–Scenario 2**

Team A is losing by a touchdown, team B is winning. Team A has possession of the ball when entering Dead Time. If Team A does not score the game is over. Team B wins. If Team A scores, Team B gets the ball and gets a chance to score. If Team B does not score and the score is not tied. Team A wins. If Team B scores, the game is over. Team B wins. If the score is a tie, tiebreaker rule is followed.

#### **Dead Time Example–Scenario 3**

Score is tied. Team A has possession of the ball when entering Dead Time. If Team A does or does not score, Team B get a chance to score. The highest score wins.

#### **Tie Breaking Procedure**

In the event of a tie at the end of regulation play the following tiebreaker procedure will be followed. The ball is placed on the 10 yd line, each team gets a chance to score in four downs or until loss of possession which ever comes first. A coin toss is used to determine who starts on offense. Multiple tie-breaking periods may be played. The league commissioner has the authority to limit the number of tie-breaking periods are played.

#### **Penalties**

To simplify the task for JDL Football coach/referees, most penalties—offensive and defensive—such as off-sides, illegal procedure, holding, block in the back, face mask infractions, etc., shall be 5- yards in length, assessed at the completion of the play or the line of scrimmage if no yardage is gained on the play.

**Pass Interference:** If, as a result of pass interference by the defense, the pass is incomplete, the play shall be ruled as a completed pass at the spot of the infraction and an automatic first down awarded. If pass interference is ruled against the offense, the penalty is 5-yards from the previous line of scrimmage and the down is replayed

**Dead-Ball Penalties Occurring after the play has ended:** These will be assessed from the new line of scrimmage.

**Fighting or major Unsportsmanlike Conduct:** 10-yard penalty plus ejection if warranted by the referee.

**Spiking the Ball:** Players are not allowed to spike the ball following a touchdown. A 5-yard penalty is awarded on the ensuing offensive play, ie spot the ball on the offense's 45-yard line – first and ten.

**Kick Offs, Punts, Extra Points and Field Goals:**

The league commissioner will set the rules for free kicks (no rush, limited rush or full rush) on punts and extra-points in each division as well as whether kick-offs and kick returns will be allowed. Commissioners are encouraged to make use of the free kick option so that players can experience the kicking aspect of football. In divisions that do not have kick-offs, the offensive team starts from its 40-yard line. Extra points if kicked score 2 points, if run/pass score 1 point.

### **Scoring**

**Touchdown** (score six points) — A touchdown is scored when a player with the ball crosses his opponent's goal line.

**Extra points** (score one or two points) — The scoring team has the option of going for a one or two point conversion. The line of scrimmage for the extra-point attempt is the opponent's 3-yard line. The attempt may be either by run, pass (score 1 point) or kick (score 2 points). In younger age groups, a kicked extra point attempt is a free kick without rushing by the defense with the ball placed at the 3-yard line. In older divisions, a free kick, a limited rush or full rush may be allowed as directed by the league commissioner. In these situations the ball placement will typically be 5-7 yards from the line of scrimmage at the discretion of the coach.

**Field goals** (score three points) — As with kicked extra points, free kick, limited rush or full rush attempts are permitted in the different divisions as determined by the league commissioner

**Safety** (two points) — A safety occurs when an offensive player with the ball is tackled in his own end zone. The team scoring the safety then puts the ball in play on offense from its own forty yard- line.

### **Key Differences**

As you can see there are some difference between the NFL and JDL. Here is a simplified list that will help those familiar with the NFL or other football programs:

- There is a running clock with no timeouts
- Time management can not affect the outcome of a game
- You will need to get permission to utilize special teams – Permission is granted based on player and coaching experience
- There is no blitzing
- Offense and defense is designed to be lined up head to head and block forward
- Formations are limited to those discussed above (specific details are provide in the playbook)