



NON-CONTACT
IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

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THANK YOU ESPN

USA Football sincerely appreciates ESPN for the support of its Football Development Model

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INTRODUCTION

USA Football's Non-Contact game category is part of USA Football's Football Development Model (FDM). This game category is designed to serve as athletes' introduction to their football journey.

The Non-Contact game category allows leagues to provide a fun and progressive way to teach and learn the sport.

By educating coaches, commissioners, officials and parents on these game adjustments, mechanics and skills, together we lead the way to a better, safer game.

What is the Football Development Model?

The Football Development Model (FDM) is USA Football’s initiative to help coaches teach athletes based on their age, stage of development, the skill they are learning and game type.

From Non-Contact to Limited Contact to Contact, USA Football has outlined a progression of game types that give leagues and players options to share and play the game in a way that is right for them. These game pathways, in addition to the skill and age progressions, help reduce contact and make the game safer.

Learn more at usafootball.com/fdm

Implementation and Game Philosophy

USA Football envisions youth programs adopting a Non-Contact game-type, such as 5v5 Flag, that fits the needs of their athletes. While USA Football provides game structure and rule books, we are aware that a particular game type may be implemented differently by leagues.

The Goals of Non-Contact:

1. Participants learn through a progressive “all players, all positions, all skills” philosophy.
 - a. Not all players may play each position in every game.
 - b. Every player should have the opportunity to play every position throughout the course of the entire season.
 - c. In practice, players should learn necessary skills of all positions for development purposes in accordance with [Football Development Model](#) principles.
2. Maximize player enjoyment and skill development.
3. Ensure all players have meaningful playing time and the opportunity for improvement and success during practices and games.
4. Provide a fun and positive first experience with football.
5. Encourage a fast-paced game with more plays and greater activity with a focus on fun.
6. Emphasize fundamental skill development by isolating situations for players to showcase their abilities.
7. Limit roster sizes to foster participation and provide more focused, individualized coaching during practices and games.
 - a. Fewer players on the sidelines mean fewer substitutions and more playing time for each athlete.

USA Football recognizes that local situations vary. Differences in numbers of coaches, registration, field space and/or equipment make the needs of leagues as diverse as the leagues themselves.

Adopting Non-Contact into your League

Non-Contact is designed to be athletes' introduction to their football journey in alignment with the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee's American Development Model (ADM) and USA Football's Football Development Model. Game types can be modified by adjusting field size, rules and equipment. By incorporating a Non-Contact option, your league can more effectively meet the needs of each athlete.

By playing Non-Contact, coaches and administrators can:

- Increase a team's coach-to-player ratio
- Play and teach in a developmentally appropriate progression
- Decrease the cognitive load on individual players
- Focus on fundamental skill development
- Deliver a fun and positive experience for young athletes

These are just some of the factors that allow coaches to dedicate greater attention to skill development. A greater focus on teaching the introductory aspects of the sport advances young athletes' understanding and learning of foundational skills. This also helps them transition to Limited Contact game types.

By adding the Non-Contact game category to your league, you provide athletes and parents with options to best fit physical and mental abilities. The steps toward mastery are not increased by earlier introduction, but by introducing young athletes to the best version of the sport for them based on their physical and cognitive abilities to learn fundamental movement and football skills.

The process of introducing a new game type requires quality coaching and communication to parents. Once you decide to adopt the Non-Contact game category, inform your coaches and parents. Keep everyone updated on what game formats will be offered ahead of time to ensure a smooth registration process. This makes parents more aware of your commitment to provide fun and positive football experiences.

Playing Non-Contact football should never be viewed as a "step back," but instead, as a forward-thinking investment in the skill development of each child. It is a step that will better prepare them for long-term development and enjoyment of football and the myriad of benefits that come with participation.

Important areas to address:

- New rules
- What they will experience and see in the new game type
- Benefits of the Football Development Model (FDM)
- Why the league adopted this model for player development
- How this will affect first-year players
- How this will affect returning players

Ten-point list for introducing Non-Contact to your league:

1. Identify age/grade group to play Non-Contact football
2. Secure league vote for adoption
3. Communicate this news to parents
4. Update your website to reflect the new pathway/addition of a Non-Contact game type
5. Secure Non-Contact marketing materials and purchase equipment (if needed)
6. League registration
7. Split age/grade number to create teams
8. Educate coaches on the game type and rules at usafootball.com
9. Finalize team schedules (depending on total number of teams)
10. Kick off the season and keep it fun

Timing & Overtime

1. Games are played on a 40-minute continuous clock with two 20 minute halves unless one team gains a 34-point advantage, at which point, the score is no longer kept. Clock stops only for timeouts or injuries.
2. Halftime is one minute.
3. Each team has two 30-second timeouts per half.
4. In playoff games only, if the score is tied at the end of 40 minutes, an overtime period will be used to determine a winner.

Scoring

1. **Touchdown:** 6 points
2. PAT (point after touchdown) 1 point (5-yard line) or 2 points (10-yard line).
 - a. **Note:** 1-point PAT is pass only; 2-point PAT can be run or pass.
 - b. A team that scores a touchdown must declare whether it wishes to attempt a 1-point conversion (from the 5-yard line) or a 2-point conversion (from the 10-yard line). Once a decision is made to try for the extra point, any change requires a charged timeout. A decision cannot be changed after a penalty. Interceptions on conversions cannot be returned.
3. **Safety:** 2 points
 - a. A safety occurs when the ball-carrier is declared down in his/her own end zone. Runners can be called down when their flags are pulled by a defensive player, a flag falls out, they step out of bounds, their knee or arm touches the ground, a fumble occurs in the end zone or if a snapped ball lands in or beyond the end zone.
4. After one team is winning by 34 points or more, score is no longer kept. Once a 34 or more-point advantage is gained, no PAT will be attempted. The game will continue in scrimmage mode for remainder of the game.
5. Forfeits are scored 20-0 for the winning team.

Participation Best Practices

The goal of the Non-Contact game is to introduce players to football in a fun and engaging way, encouraging them to continue playing and progressing in the sport.

To accomplish this, the “all players, all positions, all skills” philosophy is the focus for coaches in this game category. However, not all players will play every position every game. Allow players to learn all skills in practice to develop their athletic potential, remaining aligned with Football Development Model principles.

USA Football strongly recommends that team rosters be set to no more than two times the number of athletes required on the field (as an example: if you are playing 5v5 and 10. Roster limits should therefore be set in accordance with a league’s adoption of game types. If possible, keep roster sizes below the cap, allowing for smaller teams with fewer players on the sidelines. This results in fewer substitutions and more playing time for each athlete.

The Non-Contact game category allows for leagues to provide a fun and safe option while preserving football’s spirit and tradition. It allows parents and athletes to transition into the Limited Contact then Contact game categories at their own pace.

USA Football encourages leagues and coaches to ensure competitive matchups by blending body size, speed, temperament, skills and ability. Pregame communication between coaches highlighting gifted or aggressive players will inform them which quarters those players will be in key positions, helping keep competitive balance in the game.

These rules are to guide coaches to provide the best developmental experience for their players, not to be exploited to gain favorable matchups or advantages.

Mismatches in ability levels should be identified early in the game with changes made to ensure a competitive balance. Coaches are encouraged to keep athletes at an assigned position for the duration of the quarter and rotate on the quarter-break unless there is an obvious mismatch. Players should be challenged appropriately for their development. Better athletes only improve by competing against other quality players, and newer, or less-skilled players, fare better against equally skilled opponents. Coaches should work together to find equitable matchups for each player.

Coaches

Coaches are allowed on the field to direct players according to age, need and division. Upon the snap, coaches must be behind the deepest offensive and defensive players and out of the action. Coaches can assist in the alignment of their team to facilitate a fast-paced game but may not provide extra instruction or make audibles to play calls once the huddle is broken.

All football coaches should be certified before they reach the practice field. Coaches must earn their certification each year. Get started at usafootball.com/certification.

**** THIS MANUAL REPRESENTS PRACTICE AND IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES BASED ON OUR CURRENT LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE. RECOMMENDATIONS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE AS MORE RESEARCH AND INFORMATION BECOMES AVAILABLE.**