



NYSCA

VOLUNTEER COACH TRAINING PROGRAM



Coaching Flag Football



Coaching Flag Football

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Coaching Flag Football

The National Youth Sports Coaches Association presents coaching flag football; with Coach Shawn Moore and Coach Willis Whalen.



Shawn Moore

Welcome to the NYSCA Flag Football clinic. It is our pleasure to be working with the National Youth Sports Coaches Association, in the promotion of this great sport.

Like the NYSCA, USA Football is a firm believer in youth sports as a means to help develop children physically, emotionally and socially. We also believe that the well being of the sport depends on a broad appreciation of the game, excellence in coaching and an emphasis on safety and health. USA Football is here to help support your efforts to maximize the quality of the experience of all participants. We strongly encourage you to be ever cognizant of the NYSCA code of ethics and let it serve as an important guide as you serve the youth on your team.

USA Football hopes that you would join in our efforts to galvanize support and promote the sport at all levels of amateur football. On behalf of our chairman, board and staff of USA Football we congratulate you for taking the steps to become an NYSCA member. We appreciate your support and dedication to our great sport.



Willis Whalen

Hi my name is Willis Whalen, Senior Manager of youth programs for the Miami Dolphins. I want to welcome you to the NYSCA and congratulate you on agreeing to coach a flag football team.

Hopefully we can teach you some tips and techniques that will help you with your flag football team.





Preparing for Practice

Preparing for Practice



Coaching Points:

As a coach, you set the tone for practices, so make sure you bring your enthusiasm and positive attitude for practice. Make sure you prepare for every practice. Over prepare. Write everything down, don't just show up to practice and wing it. Also bring a whistle. Kids will react to a whistle, so that's the coach's best friend. Make sure you bring your first aid kit. Make sure that you have your emergency medical release waiver forms with you at all times and in a place that you can find them. Also make sure that you have plenty of fluids on hand for your players.

It's also about you and your attire. How you dress for your practices is going to reflect a lot on you as a coach. Make sure you dress with a coach's shirt and coach's shorts. Make sure your shirt is tucked in. Look professional and your kids will respect you more. Also make sure that your players have the proper equipment and that the equipment that they have fits properly. Let's start with the shoes.

There are many different kinds of cleats to choose from. The low top cleats are very comfortable and very common. The bottoms of the cleats are molded and there are different types to choose from. Stores usually do a great job of putting all the cleats together in the football sections so the kids have a great choice. There is also a high top shoe, which covers the ankle. People prefer those because they cover the ankle and give the ankle a little bit more protection.

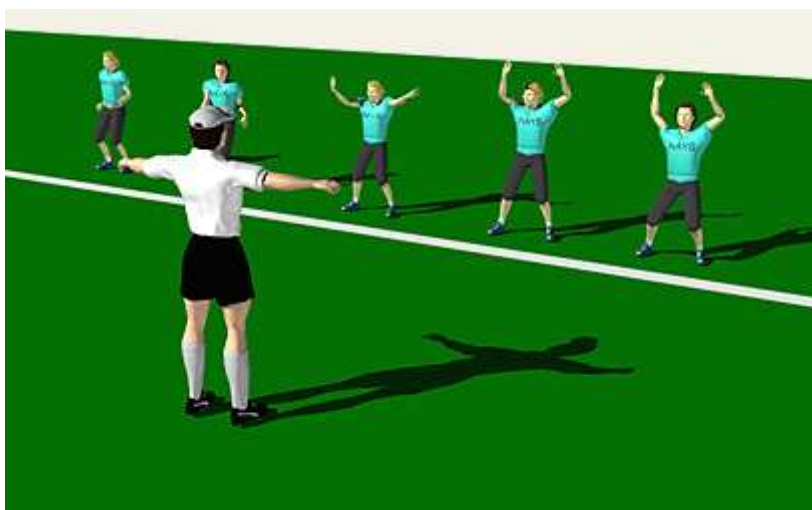
Although flag football isn't a contact sport there is chance for a collision. Therefore, mouth pieces are very important part of equipment as a flag football player. A mouth piece will help protect against concussions as well as dental problems and facial damage.

Some basic equipment in flag football is obviously the flag belt. Some flag belts have two flags on them and some have three flags on them. They are usually attached with Velcro, so they are easy attached on and off, and real easy to use as a youth coach and a youth player. One of the things to look out for with these types of belts is that the Velcro wears very easily. Some of these may fall off prematurely. Another type of belt is the “pop off” belt. When you pull the flag you will hear a pop. That helps the referees and the players know that the play is over.



Warm Up

Warm Up



Organizational Set Up

Entire Team
Practice area approx
20 x 20 yards
Supply of Cones



Coaching Points:

As a youth flag football coach one of the things that may get neglected is proper warm ups. Even professional athletes need proper warm ups in order to get them prepared for the activity they are about to do. So let's take a look at some drills and techniques that help you warm up your players.

One thing to remember when you're warming up your players, football is a multi joint exercise, which means you are using more than one joint at the same time. Doing jumping jacks is a great exercise because it utilizes your lower body as well as your upper body. One thing we also like to encourage is for the players to be out there leading the exercises, and not just the coach.

Another part of warm ups is your upper body. Doing push ups is not only a great exercise, but it warms up your upper body and also adds some strength and conditioning to your program. Some injuries that can occur during any sport are upper body injuries such as your shoulder joint or elbows. Because of this, it is a good idea to do upper body stretching exercises that stretch the shoulders and joints.

Toe touches are another great exercise because you are stretching more than one muscle at the same time. As you can see in this video segment, the players are bending down and stretching their hamstrings as well as their lower back. A lot of youth coaches believe that young kids are limber enough that they don't need to be warmed up properly. This is a great opportunity to start the kids with good habits at a nice young age.

Running in place is great exercise. The players can get blood flow in the legs and get fired up and have a little fun as well as getting the proper exercise.



Warm Up

Running



Coaching Points:

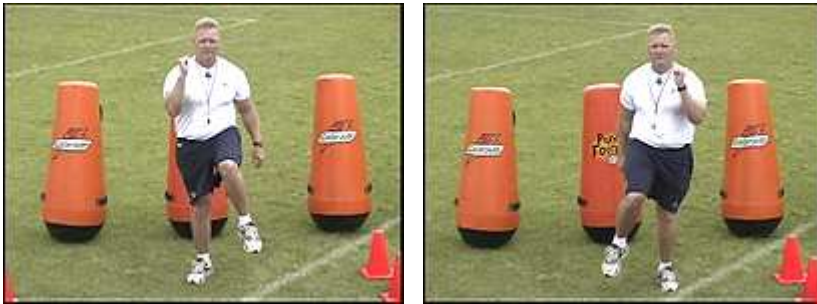
Let's talk about running. Running is a very important aspect of any sport. It's amazing how many kids don't know how to run with proper technique. So how do you teach your kids how to run? It all starts with the feet. What you want to look for is toes pointing straight ahead, about shoulders width apart. One of the common mistakes that kids make when they run is that they start with their feet pointing away from them. So look for that as you're teaching your kids to run in place. Bring your toes together; pointing straight ahead and the feet are parallel.



Players should be on the balls of their feet. Have them stand in place and lean their body forward, until all their weight comes to the front of their toes. A common mistake is that kids don't know how to pump their arms in conjunction with the lower extremities of their legs.

In place, have them raise their left knee and their right arm at the same time. Then you add in your left hand with your right leg. Then in place, have the players put those two together.

If you can teach your players how to properly form run in place and then progress the running, your players are going to leave the program in any sport they go into, better off than when they started.

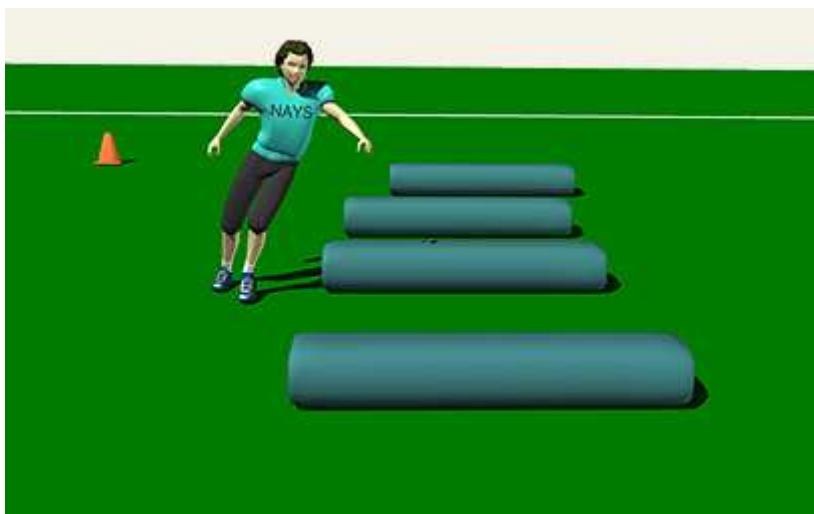


There are many warm up exercises, but the key is to use the ones that warm up the parts of the body using the activity. Do the same warm up each time. You will find that particularly the older kids will get to practice and begin the warm up routine, even before you tell them too. Also dedicate enough time for a proper warm up, but don't over do it. They are excited about learning something new and playing the game.



Warm Up

Station Drills



Coaching Points:

The best way to get all kids involved, limit standing around and maximize the learning is to teach the skills using station drills. If you have two coaches, set up two stations. If you don't have a lot of equipment you can improvise by positioning cones or even players in the positions where you see the blocking dummies. Don't allow any contact, then rotate the players to the next position so that everyone gets a chance to go through the drill.



Offense

Offense



Coaching Points:

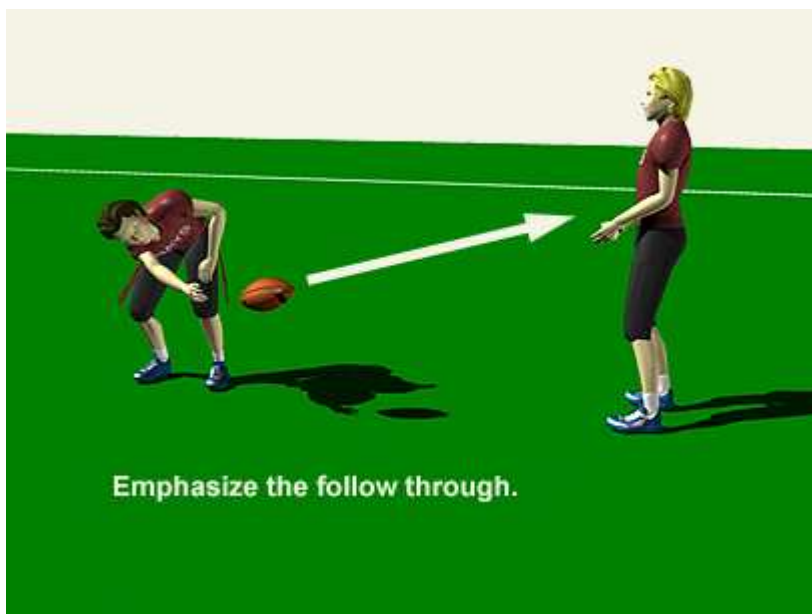
This is a basic offense. There are many different flag leagues, so if you are "five on five," "six on six" or "seven on seven" you can adjust appropriately. In this segment we are going to go over a "five on five" situation with the offense.

A basic offensive formation is with two wide receivers, a center, a quarterback and a running back. There are many different ways you can use this. You can place two wide receivers on one side, or you can have no running back in the backfield at all. That's up to you. That's when the coaching comes into play.



Offense

Side Saddle Snap



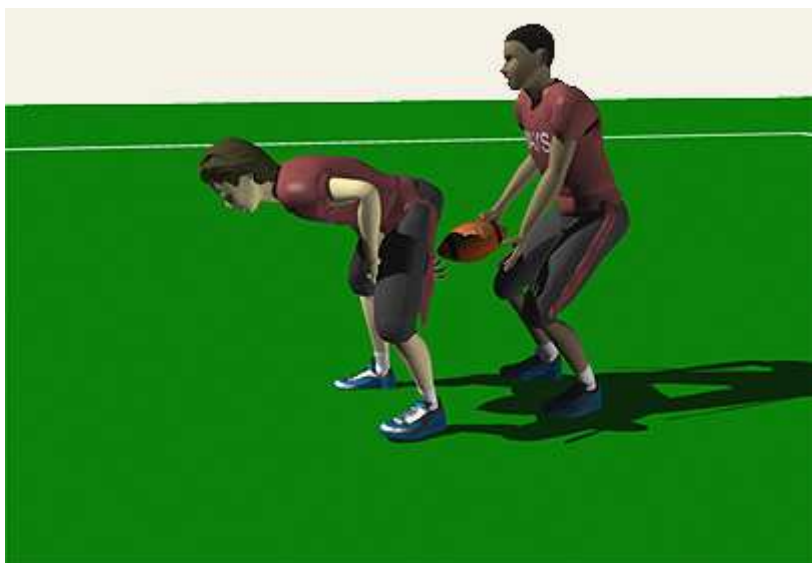
Coaching Points:

Another great technique for the younger player is the side saddle snap. The center is facing the quarterback and flips the ball up to the quarterback. One thing you should emphasize is the follow through.



Offense

Direct Snap



Coaching Points:

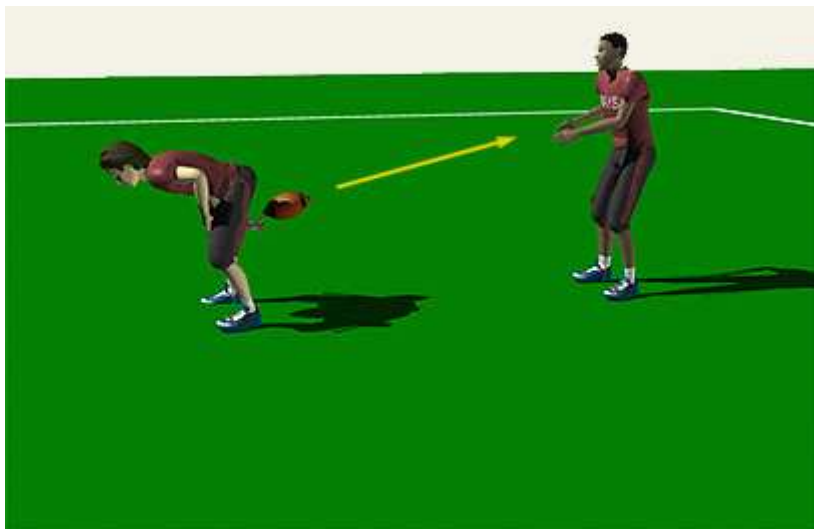
The next center/quarterback exchange comes with a direct snap. You need to emphasize that the center has a wide base, toes pointing straight ahead. The center should grab the ball towards the top, at a comfortable position. Make sure they follow through as they exchange the ball.

So coaches, the three points of the center/quarterback exchange are proper feet position with a wide base, grip of the football and make sure they follow through.



Offense

The Shotgun Snap



Coaching Points:

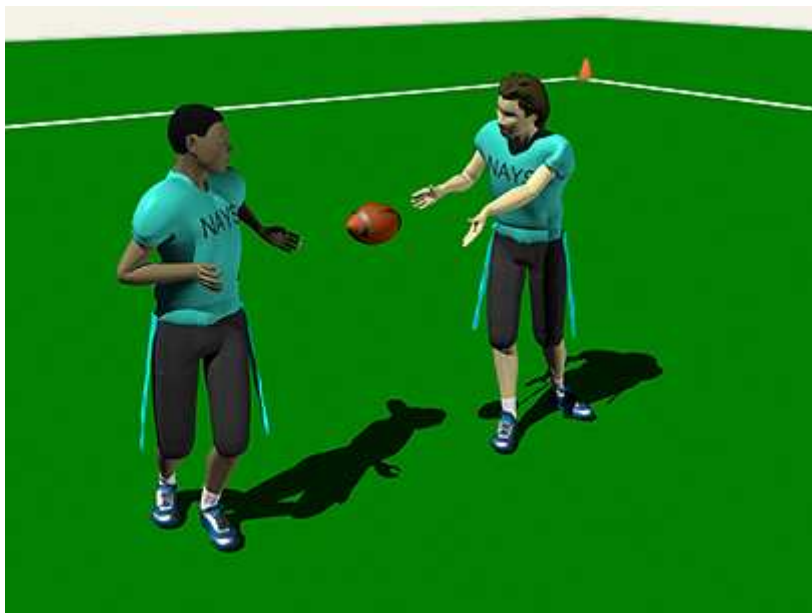
What you need to emphasize with your center is to have a nice wide base with their feet pointing straight ahead. The grip for the center on the shotgun snap is a little bit different. You want your center to grab some laces, just like the quarterback does. When they follow through to the quarterback make sure that their hand completes the motion by touching themselves in the rear end, and that way you will know that they are going to follow through.

A common mistake centers make in the shotgun snap is not following through.



Quarterback Skills

The Pitch



Coaching Points:

Let's talk about quarterback skills. There are only four skills that a quarterback can basically do in any flag football game and we're going to start off with the pitch.

Don't be overly concerned about the grip of the football. The important thing is that your quarterback leads the running back with the pitch. The feet should be pointing straight ahead, the quarterback is under center. When the quarterback receives the ball, they take a step towards the running back, turn their shoulders and pitch the football out in front of the running back.

Two points you should follow up on; your quarterback, whichever side the play is on, should take the first step with that foot. Make sure that the quarterback leads the running back with the football.



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Quarterback Skills

Direct Hand Off



Coaching Points:

Now that we have the pitch, we are going to go over the direct hand off. When the quarterback receives the snap from the center he should pull the ball in towards his body and open up towards the running back, pivoting with his left foot towards the play side, and then putting the ball directly into the target of the running back.

The running back should present a good target with his hands by having the inside elbow up and his hand underneath so the ball fits nicely in the space. He must cover the ball up and protect it. One of the common mistakes is that some players have their hands in the wrong position, causing a fumble. So make sure that you emphasize that the players have their arms in the right position and that the quarterback follows through after placing the ball in the target.



Quarterback Skills

The Forward Pass



Coaching Points:

The third skill that a quarterback needs is the forward pass, and that starts with the grip. Make sure that players grip the ball in a comfortable position, with their fingers covering some of the laces. Most of the players at a young age have small hands so have them grip towards the small end of the ball or towards the top.

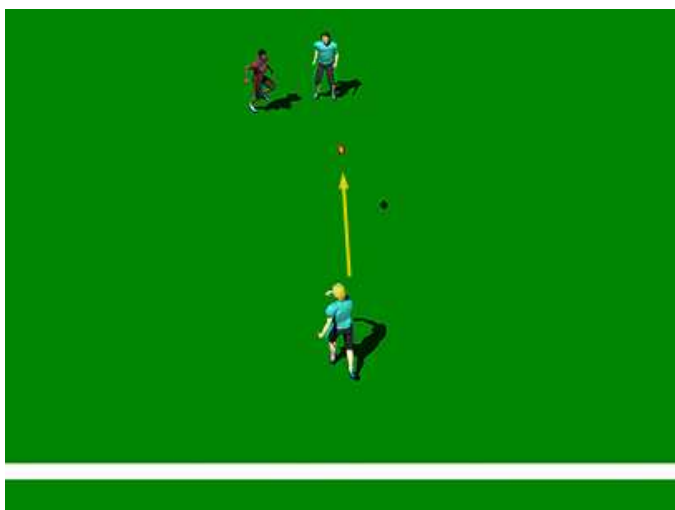
When the quarterback receives the snap from the center, they bring the ball up by their ear with their back elbow at a high point. They should square their shoulders towards the target as they are stepping into the target, and follow through with their thumbs pointing down towards the ground.



Quarterback Skills

Quarterback Drills

Quarterback Drill 1



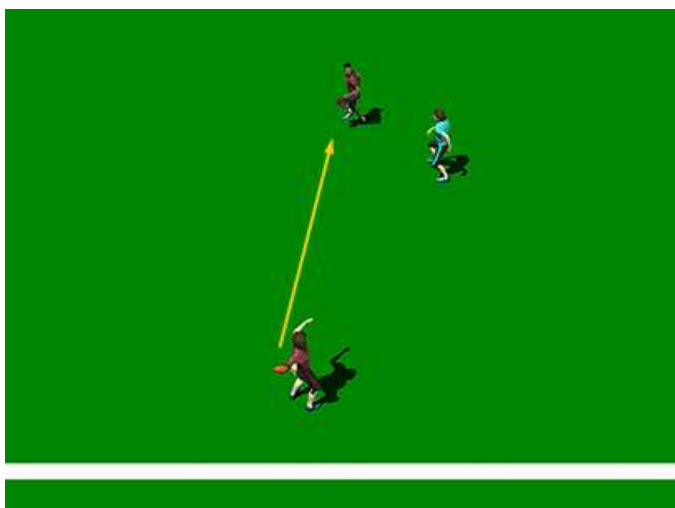
Organizational Set Up
Small groups of players
Practice area approx 20 x 30 yards
Supply of cones
Supply of footballs.



Coaching Points:

Here's a drill that puts together three basic mechanics; bringing the ball up high to its release point, stepping towards the target and following through towards your target. Have three players in an area approximately 20 x 30 yards. The quarterback throws the ball to the wide receiver. The defensive back tries to intercept the ball.

Quarterback Drill 2



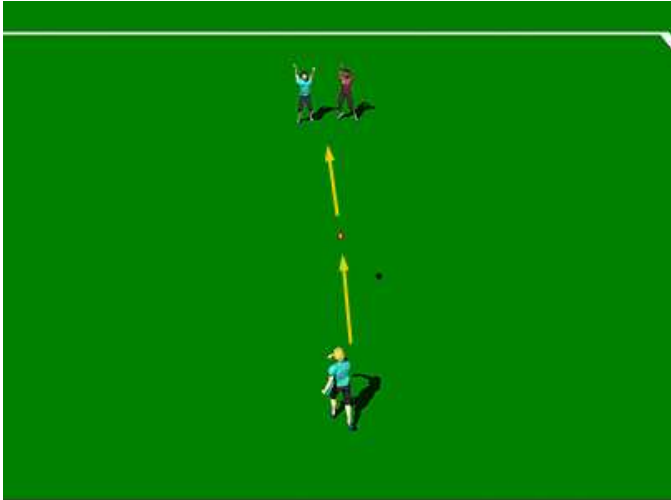
Organizational Set Up
Small groups of players
Practice area approx 20 x 30 yards
Supply of cones
Supply of footballs.



Coaching Points:

Here's a basic drill using a quarterback, wide receiver and a defensive back. Keep it simple by having your wide receivers run short patterns. Have three players in an area approximately 20 x 30 yards. The quarterback throws the ball to the wide receiver. The defensive back tries to intercept the ball.

Quarterback Drill 3



Organizational Set Up

Small groups of players
Practice area approx 20 x
30 yards
Supply of cones
Supply of footballs.



Coaching Points:

Once the quarterback and wide receivers master their short patterns, a fun extension of this drill is to have the wide receiver going deep and the quarterback and the wide receiver going for a long pass. An additional aspect of this drill is that you get to coach the defense also. To start off basic, get the defensive back to just turn and run with the wide receiver. Have three players in an area approximately 20 x 30 yards. The quarterback throws the ball to the wide receiver.



Quarterback Skills

The Scramble



Coaching Points:

Some leagues allow the quarterback to run the football and some don't. Regardless of what your league rules are, the quarterback is going to be in a position where the wide receivers aren't open and they are going to have to scramble. This is very important. This is when the lateral movement and quick feet come into play. It's important to teach your quarterback to avoid the defender before he gets the ball off into play.





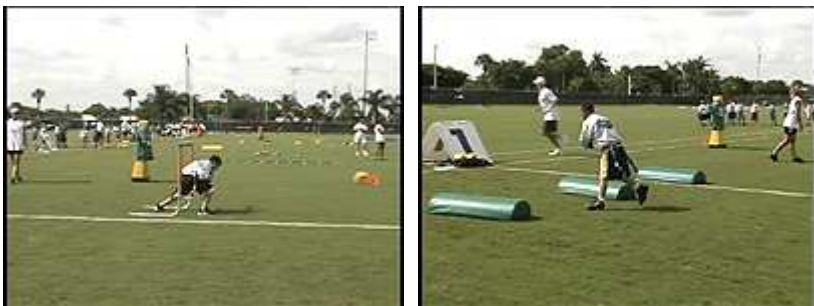
Quarterback Skills

Equipment



Coaching Points:

We realize that not every flag football team is going to have the equipment that you see in these video segments. This is a great opportunity for coaches to improvise and use whatever equipment is available. When improvising, please keep in mind, you're trying to make these stations fun and you're trying to get the players to work on technique and use some of the muscles and some of the directions they use during a flag football game. In this video segment you can see some of the players bending down, jumping over dummies and changing directions. It also gives them an opportunity to have some fun because they get to play quarterback, even if they have never played quarterback.



As the drills progress you can be as flexible as you want by working on ball control, body control and securing the football and at the end you can give them a little incentive by letting them throw at a target is if they were the quarterback.



Receiver Skills

Receiver Skills

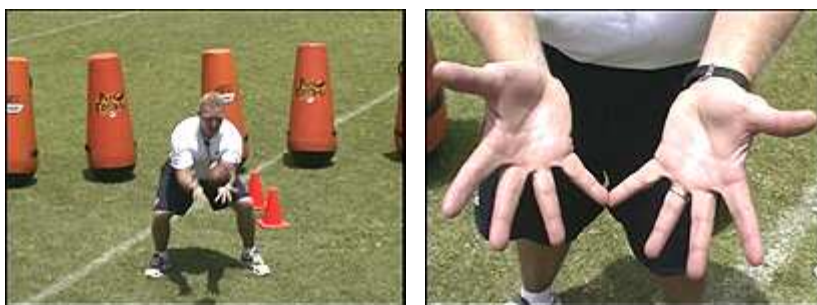
As a wide receiver the ball is going to come at you three different ways; the first one is above the waist, the second is below the waist and the third is over your shoulder for a long pass, or a bomb.

A ball coming directly to the wide receiver



Let's take a look at the hand position for a ball coming directly to the wide receiver. The wide receiver is going to place his hands with his thumbs together. The index fingers are also placed together, making a diamond with the hands. They should spread their fingers out to give a nice wide target. If their hands are too wide, the ball can bounce off the chest of the wide receiver.

A ball coming down towards you and below the waist



The next position is the ball coming down towards you, below your waist. For this your hand position changes. This time you want your pinkies together and your palms up towards the sky. Emphasize a nice big target by spreading out your fingers.

Going for the bomb

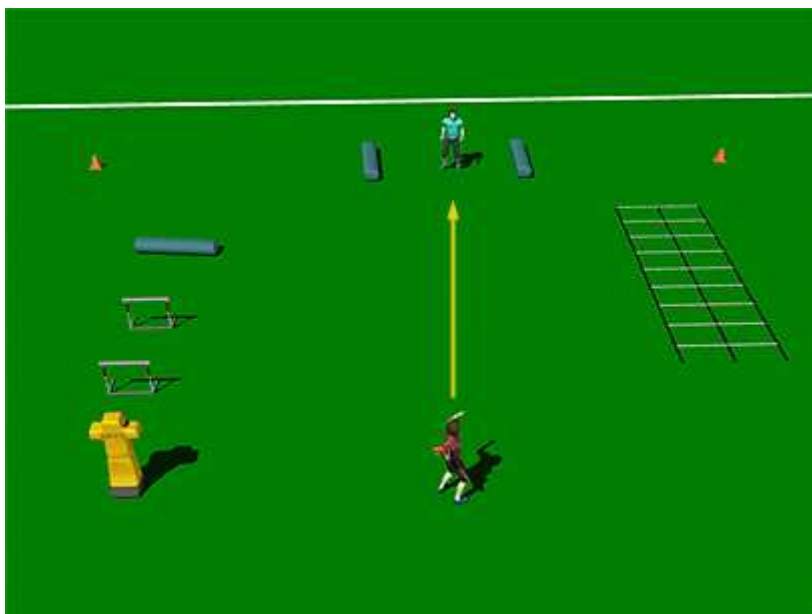


The next position the kids love the most, going for the bomb. A lot of mistakes the players make is that their hands will be facing inward. Their palms should be facing towards the sky, with their pinkies together, so they can reach out and get full extension of their arms while reaching for the bomb.



Receiver Skills

Catching Drill



Organizational Set Up
Entire Team - one player
at a time
Practice area approx
30 x 30 yards
Supply of Cones



Coaching Points:

This drill involves catching as opposed to throwing the ball. You can have a lot of fun with this drill. Having the players catch the football is a great opportunity for kids who don't play wide receiver. You can change this up many different ways by throwing a ball up in the air. You can throw the ball on the ground for a fumble, or have them intercept the ball. We finish on a fun note having them go through the quick steppers.

As a coach you identify your players for each position by seeing if they have quick feet, if they have great lateral movement or if they can catch or throw the ball. So not only is this a great fun exercise, but you get a chance to analyze your team.

When catching the ball give your quarterback a big target in the shape of a diamond, with your fingers together. Once players get into the designated catching zone, have them catch two passes. Have the players drop the first pass, and then run with the second pass.

The first player starts at the cone and gets in the wide receiver stance, with one foot in front and one foot behind. The legs should be spring loaded with the weight over the front foot. The arms should be relaxed and up. On the coach's command, have the player weave in and out of the obstacles, square up for a pass, catch the first ball and drop it. Have the player catch the second ball, tuck the football and then complete the obstacles to the finish line.

Whether you are a running back or a wide receiver, putting a great move on the defense is all part of the fun of playing flag football.



Receiver Skills

Faking out the Defense



Organizational Set Up
Entire Team - one player at a time
Practice area approx 20 x 20 yards
Supply of Cones



Coaching Points:

Faking out the defense, like any other skill has a starting point. In this drill we have wide receivers starting out in the proper position. As a coach you should emphasize having one foot in front of the other, with their knees bent and the weight over their front toe. The second thing you need to emphasize is to let their hands dangle over their front foot, or in this case bringing their hands up to their chest. Then you can start working on faking out the defense.

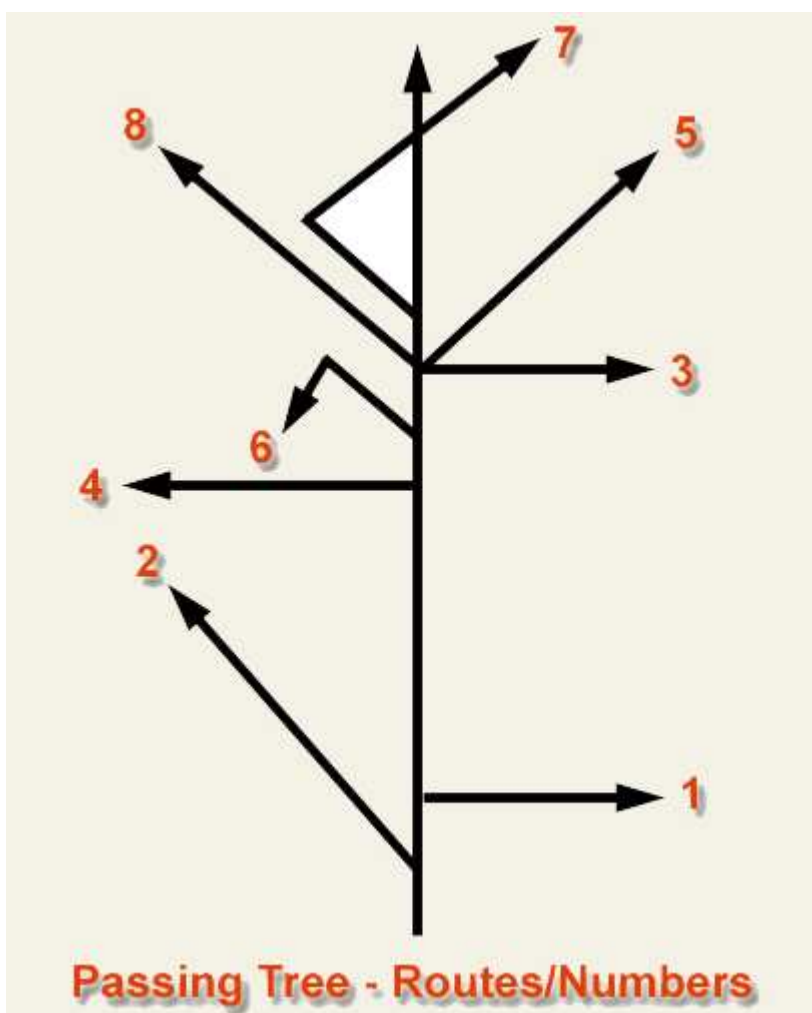
There's several ways to fake out the defense. You can jab step to one side and then go to the other. Players can also do a head fake and a jab step. A hop step can help a player fake out the defensive back and get open for a pass.

In some flag football leagues, screening is in the rules. This is a great drill that shows the running back how to use their screeners as well as the defensive player to dissect where the running back is and take the proper angle to get to the running back.



The Passing Tree

The Passing Tree



This is a basic passing tree.

1. Quick Out

The first one is the quick out. It is a five to eight yard timing route. The quarterback should throw the ball before the receiver reaches the side line and step out of bounds. The receiver needs to cut quickly towards the side line and should use a head or shoulder fake to create separation from the defender.

2. The Slant Route

The receiver should run five to eight yards forward, then make a sharp cut towards the middle of the field on a forty five degree angle. The quarterback needs to throw the ball in front of the receiver and should throw the ball as soon as the receiver makes his or her cut.

3. The Deep Out

The deep out is the same as the quick out, but the wide receiver is about twelve to twenty yards down the field when he catches the ball. The quarterback should throw the ball before the receiver makes his cut towards the side line. Remember, the wide receiver needs to run his route the same exact way every time.

4. Drag In

The wide receiver takes an aggressive step driving the defensive back approximately five to seven yards, then drags on a forty five to ninety degree angle to the opposite side of the field, from where you are originally lined up. It is similar to the quick out, except the receiver is breaking towards the middle of the field.

5. The Flag

The wide receiver explodes off the line and drives up the field approximately eight yards, looks over their outside shoulder to show the defender a fake, and then drives and continues to sprint to the deep flag. This is an out route.

6. The Curl

The receiver should run approximately five to eight yards down the field and then curl in towards the quarterback. The receiver will use his back to shield the defender from the ball. The quarterback needs to throw the ball to the chest of the receiver.

7. Post Corner

This is a deeper out route at twelve to twenty yards. The quarterback should look at the receiver when he makes a cut towards the middle of the field. This route attempts to freeze the defender in the middle of the field and allows for the receiver to make a quick forty five degree move towards the corner of the end zone.

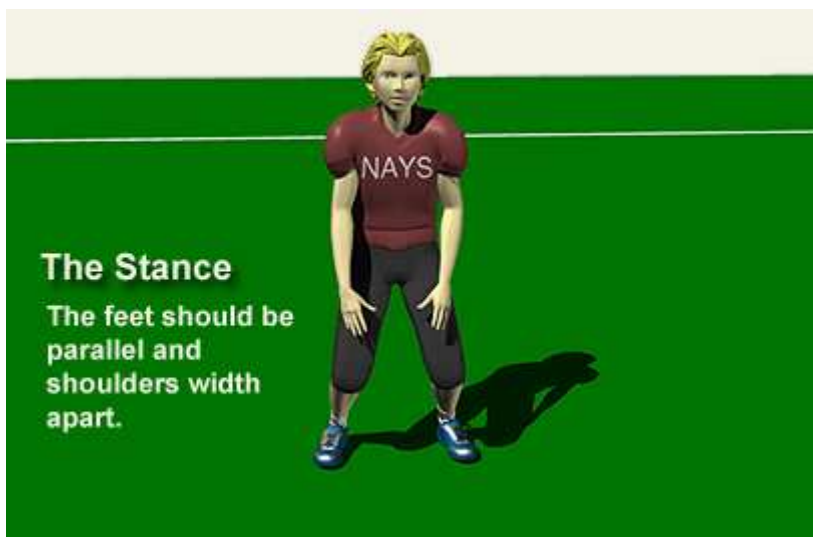
8. The Post

The post is a long pass towards the middle of the field. The post can be called when you can isolate one of your fastest receivers on a single defender. The receiver should be looking for space in the middle of the field. The pass should be thrown so the receiver can catch the ball in his stride.



Defense

Defense



Coaching Points:

One of the most difficult techniques to teach as a flag football coach is getting your players in proper position to grab a flag belt. It sounds simple but it's a very difficult task. I'm going to give you three tips to show you what I mean. First they should be in a proper breakdown position. Proper breakdown means that your feet are underneath your body about shoulders width apart. Your knees are bent. Your hips are flexed. That gives you a good position to approach the running back. The second thing you want to emphasize is the central point. The defensive player should look at either the belt buckle or the belly button of the offensive player. That way they won't get faked out by any of the techniques the running back may use. The third common mistake that we can correct is that a lot of the players like to lunge, so you want to make sure that they keep their feet underneath their body. That way they can react to the right or the left, whatever the running back reacts too.

One of the great things about flag football on defense is that there is only one stance to teach as a defensive player, because most of your players are going to play defensive back.

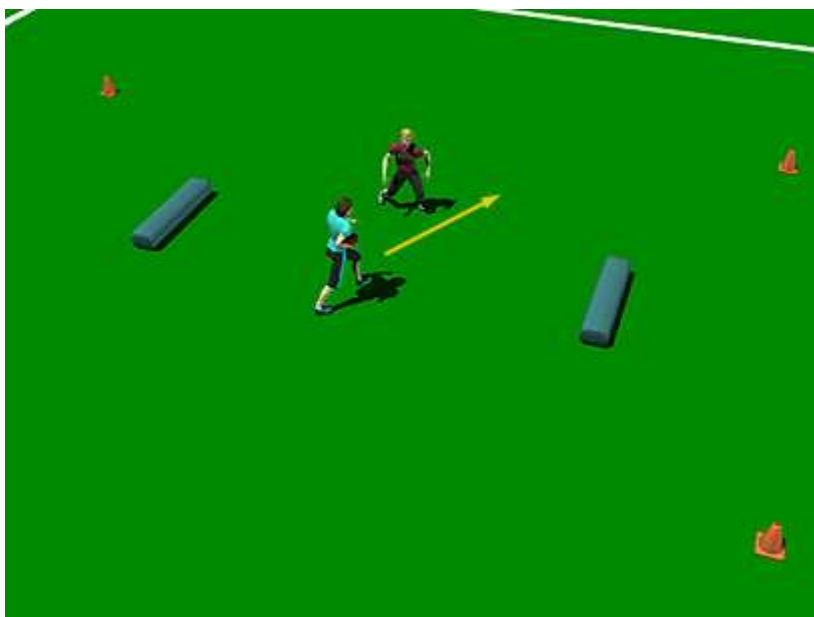
The number one thing you want to do is make sure that all of your defenders are in a proper football stance. You start that off with their feet parallel and feet about shoulders width apart. The next thing you want to do is have the players bend their knees and stick their hips back. Also their arms should be nice and comfortable. This way they can react to any side of the ball. They can go left, go right, go forward or backwards.

Every defender on the field has to have the ability to go laterally as well as forwards and back. A common mistake that players make is either bringing their feet too close together when they are doing a shuffle step, or they cross their feet over, putting them in an unbalanced position.



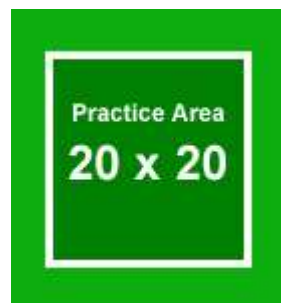
Defense

Flag Belt Drill



Organizational Set Up

Entire Team - work in pairs
Practice area approx
20 x 20 yards
Supply of cones
Supply of footballs



Coaching Points:

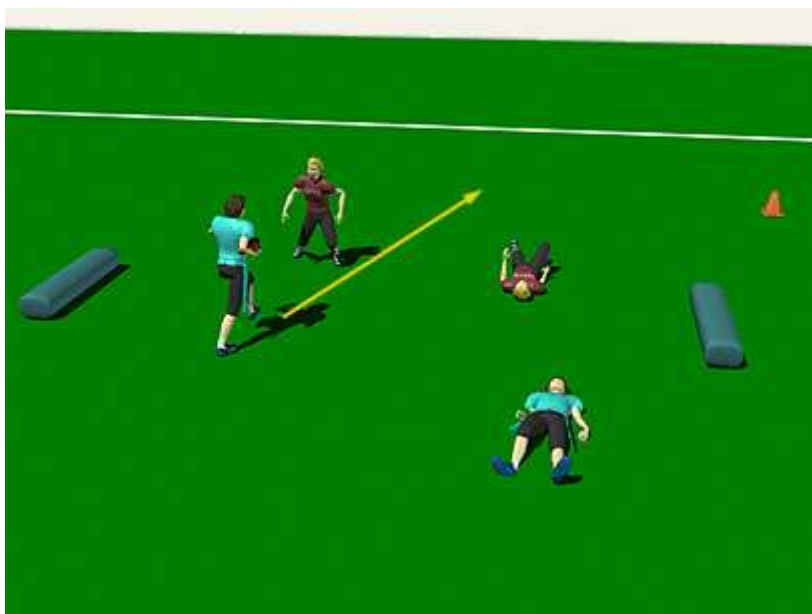
This drill takes minimal equipment and it is a great drill because it pits teammates against each other in a fun environment where you have a running back going against a line backer. One of the most difficult skills in flag football is grabbing the flag belt.

The running back takes the ball and runs around the obstacle, then back to beat the line backer. The line backer has to try and block the running back. After the exercise is completed the next pair repeat the drill.



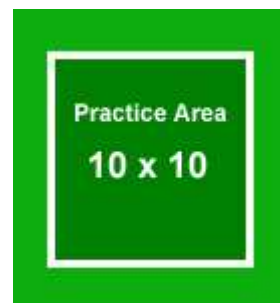
Defense

Quickness Drill



Organizational Set Up

Entire Team - work in pairs
Practice area approx
10 x 10 yards
Supply of cones
Supply of footballs



Coaching Points:

This is a great drill because it utilizes quickness as an offensive player and a defensive player. Emphasize that the defensive player gets into a proper break down position in order to get the flag. This drill is a great example of quickness on offense and defense and it doesn't require a lot of equipment.

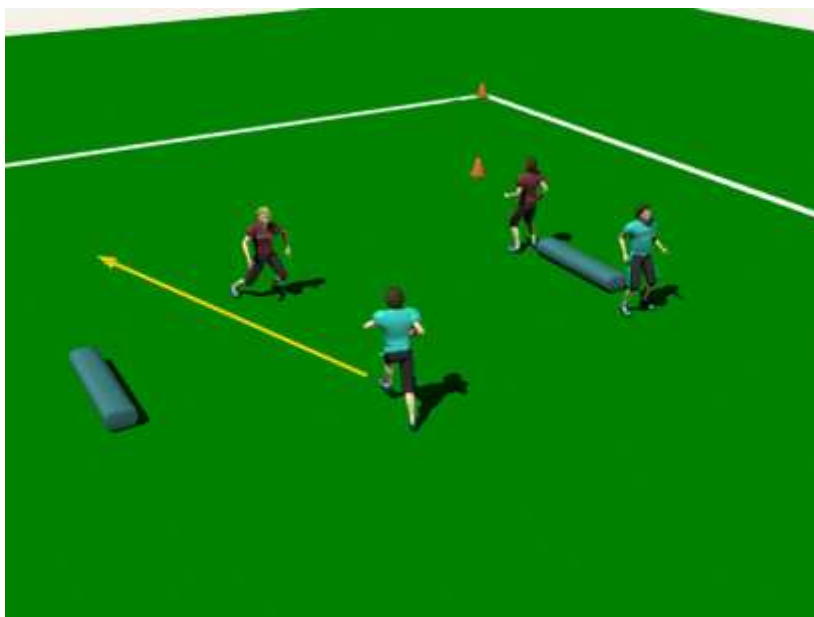
The practice starts with two players approximately 10 yards apart and laying on their backs. On the coach's command, the players recover quickly to their feet and the offensive player has to try and run past the defensive player. The defensive player has to try and block his partner.

With limited practice time teach skills that are going to be used during the game. This is a great drill and the advantage of this is that you can use your entire team and make a game out of it.



Defense

Offensive/Defensive Drill



Organizational Set Up

Entire Team - work in pairs
Practice area approx 10 x 10 yards
Supply of cones
Supply of footballs



Coaching Points:

This drill gives you an opportunity to coach both the offensive player and the defensive player. On defense, the line backer should get down in the proper position, being agile left to right, as well as moving into the proper position to get the flag. As an offensive player, we try to emphasize to the running back to secure the ball and make a move on the defensive player when he approaches.

In this drill two players stand back to back. On the coach's command, the players run forward 5 yards and check back to face each other. The offensive player has to try and run past the defensive player. The defensive player has to try and block his partner.



Defense

Grab the Flag Drill



Organizational Set Up

Work in pairs
Practice area approx
10 x 30 yards
Supply of footballs



Coaching Points:

In this drill the defensive player starts by kicking the football to the offensive player. The offensive player collects the ball and tries to run past the defensive player. The defensive player tries to block his partner.

Drills should simulate game like situations and in games you are going to have times when the ball carrier is going to have a large distance between himself and the defensive player. In this situation it's critical for the defensive player to get into a proper break down position, focus on the belt buckle of the flag belt, and not lunge towards the ball carrier.



Defense

Man to Man Defense



Coaching Points:

A very common defense, especially in flag football is the man to man defense. The number one thing you need to do is to assign one of your defensive players to cover anybody on offense. Make sure that you clearly communicate which player you are covering and also emphasize to the defensive player to stay with the offensive player, no matter where he goes on the field. As soon as he comes to try and pursue the quarterback, the ball is going to go over the defenders head, for the big score on the offense.

In man to man, you're assigning your defensive players an offensive player to cover all over the field. Whereas in a zone defense, you're going to give your players an area of the field to cover.

To add a great twist to any defense, whether it be man to man or a zone, is to assign somebody a rusher. The rusher can rush the passer, but they must be seven yards off. There are two ways you can do this; you can either disguise the rusher or you can assign your rusher and he has to be seven yards off the line of scrimmage and they can just go after the quarterback.



Summary

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Although conditioning, skills and drills are all part of the game, and a very important part of the game, all the kids want to have fun and they want to play. So make sure as a coach you dedicate enough time at the end of practice to let the kids do what they want to do, have fun and play the game. Game situations and scrimmages is a fun time for your players but it's also a great opportunity for you to evaluate your team and identify weaknesses and strengths of your team so you're well prepared for going into the next practice. There is nothing more gratifying as a youth football coach than seeing all of the hard work that you put in during the week during the practice sessions come to fruition on game day. This is when the players have the most fun and you as a coach should have the most fun as well.

USC Head Coach, Pete Carroll, once said "when somebody makes a mistake, that's the best time to coach." So keep that in mind. I hope this clinic helped. Good luck with your season. Have fun out there and congratulations on becoming an NYSCA member.



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