



Coaching Clinic

materials prepared by Jon Jacocks, August 2011

CYFFA strives to maintain an environment of safety, fun, instruction, and fair play. Your role as volunteer coaches is crucial to the success of our organization and the overall enjoyment and understanding of Flag Football by the players and parents. While it is not possible to cover every possible situation that may arise during the season, this handout is intended to offer insights and suggestions for handling your team and getting off to a good start. Please also remember that this is 8 on 8 flag football - no scholarships on the line, no signing bonuses at risk, no reason to be “over the top” with emotion or gamesmanship. We take pride in the growth and prosperity of the league and we thank you in advance for your support. The Board is here to help you be successful – ask for guidance when you need it.

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1.0 Getting (and staying) organized

There is not much time to get ready for the start of the season and we all have busy lives outside of flag football. Coaches that are thoughtful and organized will have a better overall experience and their players / parents will benefit as well. Some things to be thinking about include:

1.1 Setting the tone and leading by example

Always be on time and “agenda driven” - your players feed off of your attitudes and preparation.

Insist that your players be on time – start practices crisply and with players wearing full equipment - the message you are sending is, “we’re here to get some work done”.

Talk about what you’re doing and why you’re doing it, especially as it relates to drills or teaching you may be doing.

1.2 Effective Communications

Regular e-mail from the coach is highly recommended - make sure you have e-mail addresses (multiple ones, as needed) that each parent / player checks regularly. Commit to sending out a weekly message to reconfirm practices and game schedules. I cannot over emphasize the importance of connecting this way - things will run much smoother if you have everyone trained to “check for the coach’s e-mail” before the start of each week.

1.3 General timelines and schedules

You basically have 13 practices before opening day - that’s as many as five sessions in week one, four sessions in week two, and then two sessions per week after school starts - there is a practice game available for you on Sept 4th and opening day is Sept 11th. Practice sessions can be no longer than two hours and you will probably find that 90 minutes is going to be about the right duration unless you are scrimmaging or working on something complicated.

Milestones to target prior to opening day

Week 1

- evaluate all personnel
- identify and start training/motivating a center on offense
- identify and start working with ball handlers
- work on basic skills and start testing combinations of players
- line up a basic offense and try a couple of plays
- continue working drills and skills development throughout
- re-assess personnel and combinations of players
- schedule a combined practice/scrimmage if you are progressing well enough

Week 2

- identify and start working combinations on defense
- as you start settling on offense, reinforce a manageable number of plays
- continue to work the defense – try different alignments and combinations of players
- schedule one or two joint practices/scrimmages
- line up special teams (kicking and receiving) – good place to fill in with full roster

Weeks 3 and 4 (two practices per week) and practice game

- make sure you can get the plays called and run in less than 25 seconds
- simulate other game conditions – calling offense/defense/special teams
- insure all personnel know their primary assignments

1.4 Other suggestions for staying on top of things

Assistant coaches and parent helpers

Printed copies of rosters and contact information

Contact info for other coaches to arrange scrimmages and compare notes

Updated calendar and, again, e-mail regimen with the team

Use the League web tool for managing communications

2.0 Running a good practice

The most basic concept for the game of flag football is for the ball carrier to advance the ball without having his/her flags pulled by a defender. The offense can advance the ball by running or passing. The style and pace of play is dependent on the skill level of the team, but in all cases, is managed by the rules detailed in the **CYFFA Rules and Code of Conduct Handbook**. **You need to be familiar with that document.**

Flag football is not tackle football. It is a different concept in that the defense and offense strive for speed, quickness, deception and agility to defeat the opponent. There is contact in CYFFA, to be sure, but the game, when properly coached and played, has minimal chance for injury. The overriding factor in all coaching decisions shall be the safety of the participants.

2.1 Setting the tone and leading by example

Arrive a few minutes early to set up your practice area – have several key objectives (things to get done or work on) in mind for every practice.

Be dressed for the role and have a whistle - you have to be ready to mix it up with the team while you are working with them.

Communicate the plan for the practice - initially, you're working on "skills and drills" and figuring out best combinations of players - after that, there should always be some area of focus for portions of the practice - ie, need to reinforce key plays on offense, we got killed on special teams in the last game, the team we play this week has good passing, etc.

2.2 Time Management

Plan to use blocks of time for specific activities and also look for opportunities to have multiple activities underway at the same time – depends on availability of extra coaches, but definitely a way to accelerate skills development.

Always leave time at the end of practice for sprints and a short debrief with the team about the practice you just wrapped up.

2.3 Warm-up and stretching

Dedicate at least the first 10 minutes of each practice to stretching and calisthenics - this should be done as a team and in a controlled manner – the coach sets the tone for

doing this right. Use this time as well (while the team is stretching, as an example) for communicating key messages, what you're going to be working on that day in practice, and general banter with the players.

An example of a warm up routine includes:

- Leg stretches
- Jumping Jacks
- Push-ups
- Stomach crunches (sit ups)
- 10 yard sprints (from ready position)

After warm ups are done and before any contact is started, players should get some water and then move quickly to get their helmets on, mouthpieces in, and flags on.

2.4 Some suggestions for drills

box drill - four cones to lay out approximately 5 yd x 7 yd box - on the whistle (or with a toss from you) runner enters the box from one end and defender enters from the other end.

Allows you to teach proper running and flagging techniques and also helps you assess each player's speed, quickness, and aggressiveness as a defender.

box drill with blocker - make the box a little bigger and add a blocker to lead the runner - can also add a second defender.

"down on the ground" box drill - another variation and an opportunity to add some quickness and intensity to the activity. Participants lay on the ground, on their backs, head to head, and have to roll over and get to their feet to make the play. Use three players – one defender, one blocker, one runner.

Downfield receiver and open field defender - controlled drill where players are separated by 15 – 20 yards, coach throws to a stationary receiver (like a kick return) while defender(s) head downfield as the ball is thrown. Object is to drill concentration on the catch, open field running and flagging.

2.5 Maintaining focus

Keep things moving, take plenty of quick water breaks and use sprints (with cadence and/or ball movement) as a way to keep players moving and responsive.

Enlist the support of your team leaders to set the tone for the younger or less mature players.

2.6 Common issues, mistakes to avoid

Have several key objectives (things to get done or work on) in mind for every practice - do not let the players run around and entertain themselves while you decide what to do that day.

Be willing to try multiple combinations of players in different roles as you look for best fit. Do not rely solely on spreadsheet data - game speed and intensity does not show up in the draft day data.

Make sure that everyone understands the team concept - there is no play that works without blocking – there are eight players on the field at a time and anyone of them may have to make the “game saving” play.

Your center may be the most important player on offense – nothing happens if you can't get the ball snapped.

3.0 Game Management

The offense can advance the ball by running or passing. The style and pace of play of the offense is dependent on the skill level of the team. Successfully playing defense in flag football is a matter of stopping the offense from advancing the ball. Instead of tackling a ball carrier, however, the defender must pull the flag to stop a runner's progress. Since the offense can run or pass, the defense must be aligned to react to both possibilities. Similar to the offense, the style and characteristics of play for the defense is dependent on the skill level of the team. Bottom line is this - the coach has to figure out the cards he has been given and how to play the hand.

3.1 Arrival and preparation

45 minutes early at the fields so that you can lead the team in calisthenics, make sure you know who is available to play, and brief the team on what to expect. You can walk through a few plays, line up defense and special teams, etc.

If you are the first game of the day – make sure parents are there about an hour before kick off to prepare the fields. The head coach should not be preparing fields – you need to be working with the team.

3.2 Sideline support and management

Coaches and members of the team are permitted anywhere along the sidelines as long

as they retain decorum and do not yell at players to disrupt play. The coach is responsible for the action of himself, players and families/friends of players on his sidelines.

Coaches should be active and engaged with the whole team (not just the players on the field) to insure that all participants are ready to jump into the game. The League guideline is that every player will play at least half of the game. There are a number of ways to deal with that - specific assignments for each player so that everyone has some kind of starting role, specified offense and defense combinations (red team, blue team, etc) – bottom line – there is no “minutes played” clock, but figure out how to keep them all engaged and contributing in some way.

3.3 Play Calling

Wrist bands, flash cards, rotating players with play instructions, QB coming to the sidelines – I have seen all of these techniques used successfully – depends on your communications style and comfort level/skill level of your QB. You need a “play calling sheet” of some kind as your guide to use during the game.

Start with a very basic set of run plays and small number of pass plays - have the ability to run those plays to the right or to the left - keep things simple and focus on basic formations that can become instinctive to the offense. Your ability to call run plays or pass plays will depend on the personnel you have on the field.

You need about three basic defense formations to deal with an opponent. Lower Division passing will normally be short yardage and wide sweeps tend to be the running plays that you’ll have to deal with the most.

3.4 Adjustments

Make sure that you are keeping track of the plays you are calling – a sheet of paper with tick marks next to the plays being used is recommended. You may find that you are settling into a pattern.

Do not have a weak defender on the far side of the field – you can’t see enough to help them and the opposing coach is looking right at the “hole” in your defense. Since you change direction of play in each quarter, you will have to be able to deal with that.

Be able to change defense formations just like you change offense formations - meaning, if you come out playing one formation on defense and never change that, the other coach will figure that out. You need to keep the other team guessing a bit.

3.5 Common issues, mistakes to avoid

Keep your cool during the game - things get exciting and we are all competitive. The team (and sidelines) feed off of you - set the right example.

It is okay to ask questions and ask a parent or two to watch certain aspects of play more closely. You will be able to use that information – maybe not during the game, but at practice later.

What you don't want, however, is a bunch of parents providing constant inputs about plays to call, penalties somebody missed, etc - again, manage the interactions and ask for specific help (and explain it).

Coaches that are thoughtful and organized will have a better overall experience and their players / parents will benefit as well.

Have extra pieces of equipment in your game bag - a spare knee pad or two, extra mouthpieces, some tape, etc

4.0 Where to go for additional guidance

Be very familiar with the CYFFA Rules and Code of Conduct - the document is pretty well written and organized.

You can google terms like “flag football”, “flag football play calling” and/or check at the library for books/tapes on coaching youth football. Even if the material is devoted to tackle football, there will be tips and ideas for drills you can modify.

The CYFFA Board is always in attendance at games - we have a tent that is plainly visible overlooking the fields and someone is normally there to answer questions. You can also e-mail the web site if something comes up during the week.

On a limited basis (schedules permitting), Board personnel may be available to come watch your practice session and/or coach a specific topic at a practice. That's tougher to arrange, obviously, but we are interested to help you.