

BAFA flag football rules 2026

30th April 2026



This list contains all BAFA variations to flag football rules for 2026, including those scheduled for adoption in 2027.

1 International playing rules

The International Federation of American Football has not changed its flag rules since 2023, so the version of the rulebook at <https://rules.bafra.info/flag/2023/FlagRules2023.pdf> still applies.

2 British amendments to IFAF Rules

Additionally, the IFAF rules allow National Federations (such as BAFA) to make changes for their competitions. All games in BAFA-affiliated competitions shall be played with the following changes:

2.1 Down box, scoreboard and pylons (rule 1-1-1)

The use of a down box, scoreboard and pylons is very strongly recommended. However, they are not mandatory for British games.

2.2 Rosters & mixed-gender teams (rule 1-1-1)

There is no limit to the number of participants who may appear on a British roster. Competitions may allow the entry of mixed-gender teams.

2.3 The ball (rule 1-2-1)

Adult teams who wish to participate in IFAF-sanctioned competition are strongly advised to use leather balls when they are in possession, because these are the only balls that will be allowed in IFAF games. However, they are not mandatory for British games. In mixed adult competitions, youth-sized balls may be used.

2.4 Mouthpiece (Rule 1-3-1-d)

For adult competition, a mouthpiece is strongly recommended. For all other competition it is mandatory.

2.5 Head coverings (Rule 1-3-2-b)

Players may wear an entirely soft head covering to protect their head from the elements. However, any head covering that has any stiff or rigid part is illegal equipment.

2.6 Game timing and number of time outs (Rules 3-2-1 and 3-3-2)

At their discretion, competitions may vary the duration of the game and the number of time outs.

3 Changes to take effect from 2027

Implementation of the following rules is recommended as good practice for the 2026 season but will not formally come into effect until the start of the 2027 season.

3.1 Requirements for a flag game

A BAFA flag game may not commence, nor proceed if suspended, unless:

1. All squad members meet any age group requirements defined by the competition authority.
2. The squad members, coaches and other persons in the team area of each BAFA-affiliated team are registered with BAFA.
3. Each team has, at the field, at least the minimum number of squad members defined by the competition authority. **Exception:** A competition minimum only needs to be met at the scheduled kickoff time or, optionally for games in a tournament, at the scheduled kickoff time of the first game of the tournament; thereafter the minimum is the normal number of players specified in Flag Rule 9-2-2-f.
4. Each BAFA-affiliated team has, at the field, at least the minimum number of licensed coaches defined by the competition authority. All coaches must hold a BAFA Level 1 or higher qualification. The competition authority

30 April 2026

may also define a minimum number of coaches qualified at or higher than a particular BAFCA qualification level. **Exception:** A competition minimum only needs to be met at the scheduled kickoff time or, optionally for games in a tournament, at the scheduled kickoff time of the first game of the tournament; thereafter the minimum number is one at Level 1.

5. There are at least the minimum number of officials defined by the competition authority. The competition authority may:
 - a. specify separate minimums for licensed and unlicensed officials;
 - b. specify separate minimum levels for the Referee and for the other officials.
6. The Referee has declared the field safe and ready to play.
7. The minimum medical requirements (Rule 3.7 below) are met.

STOP, REPORT & SANCTION -

Under no circumstances may the game commence, nor proceed if suspended. BAFA may apply sanctions for the following breaches: · BAFA game requirements not met. Participants risk not being fully covered by BAFA's insurance policy if this is violated.

3.2 Team areas

Team areas must be marked: preferably with lines, but with training cones or similar non-hazardous markers if not.

1. Only registered players, coaches and other persons registered with the team are permitted in the team area.
2. Where the playing enclosure does not permit a team area to be marked on each side of the field, both teams may share a common sideline. In this case the team areas shall be marked on either side of midfield between the five-yard line and the line five yards from midfield.

3.3 Spectator areas

No spectators or other persons not directly involved in the game may be located within 6 yards of the sideline or end line, or within 3 yards of the back of the team area. Areas should be marked for the use of spectators. Game management shall ensure that all spectators remain in these areas and follow the BAFA Regulations relating to spectator conduct.

3.4 Game designation

1. The competition authority shall designate each game as either a "regular season" or "playoff" category game. If there is no competition authority, the game shall be designated as a "friendly".
2. The competition authority may stipulate different game requirements for different categories of game.

3.5 Officials

The BAFA organisation acting as game or tournament management must, for each game, appoint sufficient individuals to meet the competition's officiating requirement (Rule 3.1.5 above). Preferences: licensed officials over unlicensed officials over unqualified officials; neutral officials over equal numbers of officials from each team over unequal numbers of officials from each team. The highest qualified or most neutral official should normally be appointed as Referee.

3.6 Levels of officials

1. An official is defined as licensed if, at the time of the game:
 - a. They are registered with BAFA, and
 - b. They hold a BAFCA Flag Football Officiating qualification or a BAFCA Self Officiating for Flag qualification, and
 - c. They hold public liability insurance for officiating.
2. An official is defined as unlicensed if, at the time of the game:
 - a. They are registered with BAFA as an official, player, coach, sideline person or game person but do not hold the appropriate officiating qualification as noted in Rule 3.6.1.
 - b. They hold public liability insurance.
3. An official is defined as unqualified if, at the time of the game they do not meet the criteria for licensed or unlicensed official.

3.7 Medical requirements

1. The minimum medical requirement is that it is recommended that an emergency first aider is available at each game. At a tournament, the first aider may be shared between games if all fields are within 100 yards of the first aider's normal location and they have a clear view of all fields.
 - a. BAFA currently defines an emergency first aider as someone who holds a Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) (or NQF or QCF or Scottish/Welsh equivalents) Level 3 first aid qualification.

3.8 Accessibility

1. In the interests of accessibility, BAFA may approve on a case-by-case basis applications to:
 - a. permit a participant to use prosthetics during games
 - b. permit a reasonable adjustment to the field, uniform and equipment rules for a disabled participant
2. To be approved, it must be demonstrated via a risk assessment that this:
 - a. does not pose an undue risk to the participant
 - b. does not pose any additional risk to other participants
 - c. does not convey an unfair competitive advantage to the participant or their team
3. Risk assessments are considered by a panel drawn from the Rules Committee, Sports Science and Medicine Committee and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee.
 - a. The Committee may approve the participation in the sport by the applicant subject to the implementation of the adaptations/adjustments.
 - b. If the panel cannot approve participation, it may suggest amendments to the risk assessment to make it acceptable.
4. Once accepted, risk assessments are shared by the prosthetic user's club with their future opponents, future match officials and other relevant parties. Approvals must be notified to IFAF in the case of people who intend to participate in international competitions.

3.9 Procedure for suspending the game

1. The referee must suspend the game under the following circumstances:
 - a. if all match balls are illegal;
 - b. if the down box is inoperative;
 - c. if one or more officials' assistants become unavailable or are dismissed due to incompetence;
 - d. if the medical cover drops below the minimum level;
 - e. if the field surface makes proper game administration impossible or an obstruction becomes hazard;
 - f. if no officials are able to supervise the game, due to injury or for any other reason;
 - g. if weather conditions become hazardous to participants or spectators;
 - h. if the behaviour of any person is prejudicial to the orderly conduct of the game;
 - i. for any other reason which poses a hazard to participant or spectator safety;
 - j. for any other contingency not covered by the rules.
2. The referee shall wait for a reasonable time to permit the problem(s) to be rectified. However, if it becomes clear that the game cannot continue, the referee shall abandon the game and notify game management. A delay due to lightning must extend at least until 30 minutes after both the last sound of thunder and last flash of lightning (See Appendix B of the Contact Rules).
3. The referee shall abandon the game if it is not resumed within 60 minutes (or a specified longer period agreed unanimously by both head coaches and the referee).

3.10 Removing persons from the playing enclosure

1. The referee may require game management to remove any person from the playing enclosure who they believe poses a threat to the safety of persons subject to the rules or the officials, or whose behaviour is prejudicial to the orderly conduct of the game. The referee may suspend the game while this takes place.

30 April 2026

3.11 Referee reports

1. The referee must report to BAFA:
 - a. all forfeits, cancellations and abandonments, and
 - b. all disqualifications and persons required to be removed from the playing enclosure

3.12 Definition of terms

Where terms are not defined in the BAFA Flag Rules, the definition used in the BAFA Contact Rules shall apply.

4 Questions and feedback

Questions regarding the interpretation of the flag rules may be addressed by email to the Chair of the BAFA Rules Committee at rules@britishamericanfootball.org.

Note that both IFAF and BAFA are looking to improve the rules; both in the way in which the game is played, and editorially in the way the rules are expressed in writing. Suggestions in either of these regards are welcome, also to the above email address.

Dr Jim Briggs, Chair, BAFA Rules Committee
with the BAFA Flag Rules Specialist Working Group