



LIMITED CONTACT™

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

USA Football's Limited Contact game types are part of the Football Development Model (FDM) and are designed to be a bridge between Non-Contact (i.e., flag football) and Contact game types (i.e. traditional full-field tackle), as well as young athletes' introduction to contact within their football pathway.

The Limited Contact game types allow leagues to provide a more progressive way to teach the sport, including the skills of blocking, defeating blocks and tackling.

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

Learn more about all USA Football supported Game Categories and Game Types by visiting usafootball.com/gametypes.

WHAT IS THE FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT MODEL?

The Football Development Model (FDM) is USA Football's initiative to help coaches teach athletes based on their developmental stage, the skills they are learning and the game type they are playing.

USA Football outlines a game types progression from flag to traditional tackle, delivering options to enjoy and grow with the game. A spectrum of game types, in addition to skill and age progressions, help reduce contact for safer play.

Learn more at usafootball.com/fdm.

IMPLEMENTATION AND GAME PHILOSOPHY

USA Football envisions youth programs adopting Limited Contact game types that fit the needs of their athletes'. While USA Football provides game structure and rule books, we are aware that they may be implemented differently league to league. For instance, the number of players on the field may vary to meet a youth program's needs and circumstances.

The Goals of Limited Contact:

1. Participants learn through a progressive "all players, all positions, all skills" philosophy.
 - a. Not all players may play every position; however, each player should play a minimum of one offensive and defensive line position as well as one offensive and defensive skill position in every game.
 - b. In practice, players should be encouraged to learn the core skills needed to play all positions. This approach aligns with the whole-child development philosophy of the Football Development Model. Remember, great football players are built from great athletes.
2. Maximize player enjoyment and skill development.
3. Ensure all players have meaningful playing time and the opportunity for improvement and success during games.
4. Provide a bridge between Non-Contact and Contact football game types.
5. Encourage youth leagues to play on field sizes and implement versions of the game that are appropriately scaled to their players' age, size, contact readiness and skill level.
6. Encourage a fast-paced game with more plays, increased player involvement and a focus on fun.
7. Emphasize fundamental skill development by isolating situations for players to showcase their abilities via formation restrictions and level of contact.

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8. Limit contact to provide a more progressive way to teach blocking, defeating blocks and tackling.
 - a. Coaches teach the fundamentals of contact and tackling in a progression at an appropriate rate for their players.
 9. Limiting roster sizes to provide as much focused, individualized coaching attention as possible during practices and games.
 - a. USA Football recognizes that multiple factors go into determining roster sizes. Your organization needs to decide what is best for your programs.

Questions to consider include:

- How many coaches do you have on staff?
- How will you ensure personalized coaching attention given the athlete-to-coach ratio?
- Are athletes playing both offense and defense?
- Do you account for potential injuries and sickness throughout the season?

USA Football recognizes that local situations differ. Differences in numbers of coaches, registration, field space and/or equipment make the needs of leagues as diverse as the leagues themselves. In light of this, USA Football has created rules for 6-, 7- and 8-player versions of Rookie Limited Contact™ and Senior Limited Contact™ which may involve 6-to-11 players.

CONTACT LEVEL AND EQUIPMENT

What are the equipment options?

Using padded flag or TackleBar® equipment are great ways to incorporate aspects of contact into a player's journey while limiting total contact load. Blocking and defeating blocks are an integral part of Padded Flag, just as they are in traditional football; only the "tackle" aspect of this game type is specific to flag football rules. Players wear flags in addition to helmets and shoulder pads. Some leagues also introduce football pants and lower body pads as part of the uniform.

The outcome is players progressing to the next stage of their pathway with confidence and knowledge in two of football's three primary contact skills (blocking and defeating blocks). As players ascend from Padded Flag, they are primed to learn tackling in the next progression.

Athletes learn quality tackling fundamentals in the tracking and preparation phases of tackling but are not engaging in contact with the ball carrier.

The league provides each player with flags, helmets, shoulder pads and a team jersey. Padded pants are optional. Teams use footballs provided by their league.

- Players must wear shoes. Cleats may not be allowed at certain locations; however, cleats with exposed metal are never allowed and must be removed.
- Players may tape their forearms, hands and fingers. Players may wear gloves, elbow pads and knee pads. Braces with exposed metal are not allowed. Players must wear a mouthguard during practices and games.
- Players must remove all jewelry, hats and do-rags.
- Players' jerseys must be tucked into pants if they hang below the belt line.
- We recommend players wear football pants that do not have pockets. Football pants with belt loops or pockets must be taped. Shorts or athletic pants with pockets, for those leagues that do not wear game pants, must have all pockets taped. Games will not be delayed for a player to tape up pockets.

What is TackleBar®?

Your athletes wear a TackleBar® harness that consists of two foam bars that run parallel to a player's back along with traditional football attire (helmet, shoulder pads, thigh, knee, hip and tailbone pads). The defender will go through the proper progression of tackling (tracking, preparing and initial connection) before pulling a bar from the harness. This allows coaches to focus more on teaching blocking and defeating blocks to a higher level because the full skill of the tackle is not used.

By slowing down the introduction of new skills, coaches, and in turn players, have more time to master fewer skills at this stage of their development. USA Football endorses the use of TackleBar® equipment to help bring the Limited Contact game type to life.

Required protective equipment includes:

- Helmet and mouthguard
- Shoulder pads
- TackleBar harness (bars)
- Padded football pants

Contact your USA Football representative to learn about equipment options for Limited Contact. Reach them by visiting usafootball.com/consultants.

ADOPTING LIMITED CONTACT INTO YOUR LEAGUE

Limited Contact builds upon the skills gained in Non-Contact football as part of a player pathway in alignment with the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee's American Development Model (ADM) and USA Football's Football Development Model. The game type can be modified by adjusting field size, rules and equipment. By incorporating a Limited Contact option, your league can more effectively meet the developmental needs of each athlete.

Game Types:

Rookie Limited Contact: Shorter and/or narrower field, 6-8 players per team.

Senior Limited Contact: Full field, 6-11 players per team.

By playing Limited Contact in the year(s) between flag and traditional full-field tackle football, coaches and administrators can:

- Increase teams' coach-to-player ratio
- Play and teach in an appropriate progression
- Decrease the cognitive load on individual players
- Focus on skill development
- Deliver a fun and positive experience for young athletes
- Slow down the skill progression to provide more teaching and better learning

These are just some of the factors that allow coaches to dedicate greater attention to skill development, especially newly introduced skills of blocking, defeating blocks and eventually tackling. A greater focus on teaching these aspects of the sport advances young athletes' understanding and learning of foundational skills, helping them transition to Contact game types.

USA Football's Limited Contact game types evolve the sport by allowing parents, athletes and coaches to progress into Contact in a progressive and developmentally appropriate way.

By adding Limited Contact game types to your league, you provide parents with options that may fit their children's physical and mental abilities. By introducing young athletes to a version of the sport based primarily on their physical and cognitive abilities, we can help them learn fundamental movement and football skills while increasing levels of engagement, skill development and fun. This will ultimately build a better player and one who enjoys the game to a greater degree.

The process of introducing a new game type requires quality coaching and communication to parents. Inform your coaches and parents once you decide to adopt the Limited Contact game type. Keep everyone updated on what game formats are offered ahead of time to ensure a smooth registration process. Informing parents of a new game type option also makes them aware of your commitment to provide fun and positive football experiences.

Playing Limited Contact football should never be viewed as a “step back,” but instead, as a forward-thinking investment in the skill development of each athlete. 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
- The 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

Thirteen-point list for introducing Limited Contact to your league:

1. Identify age/grade group to play Limited Contact football
2. Adopt a game type:
 - a. Rookie Limited Contact or Senior Limited Contact
3. Select the number of players
 - a. Rookie Limited Contact: 6-, 7-, or 8-player
 - b. Senior Limited Contact: 6- to 11-player
4. Choose a game format:
 - a. Padded Flag or TackleBar
5. Secure league vote for adoption
6. Communicate change to parents
7. Change website to reflect the new pathway and addition of a Limited Contact game type with Padded Flag or TackleBar harnesses
8. Secure Limited Contact marketing materials and purchase needed equipment
9. Set up league registration
10. Split age/grade number to create teams

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11. Educate coaches on the game type and rules
 12. Finalize team schedules (depending on total number of teams)
 13. Kick off the season and keep it fun

TIMING AND OVERTIME

1. Halftime is five minutes.
2. Each time the ball is spotted, a team has 35 seconds to snap the ball. Teams will receive one warning before a delay-of-game penalty is enforced.
3. Each team has 2 timeouts per half.
4. Officials can stop the clock at their discretion.
5. In the event of an injury, the clock will stop, then restart when the injured player leaves the field and both teams are lined up and ready to resume play.
6. Extra points are untimed downs to allow for the choice of 1- or 2-point try and to change sides of the field in preparation for the next possession.
7. The option for adjusting the number of timeouts or stopping the clock on turnovers is a league's decision.
8. Overtime is played only in playoff games (if the league hosts playoffs) and run in accordance with **NFHS rules**.

For Rookie Limited Contact:

1. Each game is comprised of four 10-minute quarters with a running clock
 - a. The clock should be stopped after a score (the point after attempt [PAT] is an untimed down) and to allow players to switch sides of the field and change from offense to defense.
 - b. Once the ball is placed at the 40-yard line, the clock starts at the official's whistle. Allow time for water, rest and new position assignments in between quarters. Ensure rotations occur and players learn multiple skills.

For Senior Limited Contact:

1. Each game is comprised of four quarters:
 - a. 12 minutes with a running clock or
 - b. 8 minutes with a standard clock

PARTICIPATION BEST PRACTICES

The goal of Limited Contact game types is to introduce players to the contact skills of blocking, defeating blocks and introductory aspects of tackling, while building from flag football's multi-position skill development.

To accomplish this, the “all player, all positions, all skills” philosophy remains the focus for coaches in this introduction to contact football. It is acknowledged that not all players will play every position every game. Some may not get to play every position throughout the season, but development in practice is still vitally important. Allow players to learn all skills in practice to help them reach their full athletic potential, staying aligned with the core principles of the Football Development Model.

USA Football strongly recommends that team rosters be set no more than two times the number of athletes required on the field (as an example: if you are playing 7-on-7, the roster limit should be 14). Roster limits should therefore be set in accordance with a league's adoption of game types. It is further recommended, if possible, to keep the number 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.

USA Football encourages leagues and coaches to ensure competitive matchups by blending body size, speed, temperament, skills and ability. Pregame communication of gifted or aggressive players may be useful in letting opposing coaches know which quarters certain players should be matched up against each other regardless of “big/little” standards.

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 get better 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.

Athletes should not change positions mid-series or mid-quarter dependent upon down and distance or field position. This emphasizes skill development across multiple positions and puts less priority on the game's score.

One of the most common questions around position sampling is the bigger, stronger, faster athlete who is now allowed to rotate into a ball-carrying position. A benefit of quarter rotations is that such athletes cannot play running back (as an example) for an entire game. They must rotate to the line, limiting their ball-carrying impact. Athletes should have the ability to learn multiple positions and may only play running back for one quarter. Competitive imbalances are naturally diminished through position rotation.

COACHES

The number of coaches per team is determined by the league, however, USA Football recommends a coach-to-player ratio of 1:6 to 1:10 (maximum) if possible. While the desire for coaches to work with their own children may be a driving influence, leagues should look for creative ways to create numerical balances. This is done for the sake of the players. All players deserve an equal opportunity to learn and be coached.

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.

USA Football has launched a Coach Membership for coaches that are looking for additional educational opportunities. The memberships includes certification as well as: Youth Tackling & Contact System, full access to USA Football Community, monthly coaches notes, discounts on premium systems, Coach Planner App and much more. Join today at usafootball.com/membership.

RECOMMENDED SEASON LENGTH AND GAMES PER SEASON

Limited Contact football is designed to be a single-season offering to run concurrently with other tackle divisions within a youth program. USA Football recommends a maximum of one game per week to allow for adequate rest, recovery and practice time dedicated to fundamental skill development and learning the game.

USA Football recommends no more than 10 games per season and encourages leagues to consider athlete health and wellness when determining the number of games of developmental maturity. A game is defined as a preseason scrimmage, regular-season game or playoff competition.

A league that incorporates playoffs into its schedule should adjust the number of regular season games as well as preseason scrimmages, so the total does not exceed 10 competitions. Leagues that host playoffs also should consider hosting consolation rounds so all athletes receive the same number of games and opportunities for development. There should be a minimum of five days between games.

WEEKLY PRACTICES AND CONTACT LIMITS

Preseason Heat Acclimation

Prepare Your Players to Exercise in the Heat

About 90 percent of heat stroke cases occur during the first few days of practice, when athletes are unprepared to cope with environmental conditions and physiological demands.

EXERTIONAL HEAT STROKE (EHS)

currently ranks among the top three causes of deaths in sports.

GRADUALLY INCREASE

Intensity
Duration
Time with equipment



Intensity and Hydration

Keep players hydrated. Schedule rest periods.

Spend the first two weeks of practice gradually increasing the length and intensity of practice as well as the amount of equipment worn. Athletes should have access to fluids at all times and have periods of rest throughout a practice.

Preseason Heat Acclimation

1 practice per day.

Practices interrupted by inclement weather or heat restrictions should only resume once conditions are safe. Modify work-to-rest ratio in extreme environmental conditions or reschedule to cooler parts of the day.

PRACTICE DAYS 1&2



HELMETS ONLY

NO FULL CONTACT DRILLS

PRACTICE DAYS 3&4



HELMETS & PADS ONLY

NO FULL CONTACT DRILLS

Intensity of drills and activities should slowly and gradually increase as part of the acclimatization period.

PRACTICE DAYS 5&6



FULL PADS (optional)

FULL CONTACT DRILLS ALLOWED

Practice Time Guidelines & Recommendations

AGE	PRACTICE LENGTH (MINUTES)	PRACTICES PER WEEK
Age 5+	30-60 min	1-2 practice(s)
Age 8+	60-90 min	1-3 practice(s)
Age 10+	75-105 min	2-3 practices
Age 12 thru Pre-HS	90-120 min	2-3 practices

Note: This chart is strictly concerned with the frequency and duration of practices as it relates to age. Time limits of contact are addressed on the next page.

REGULAR SEASON RECOMMENDATION

Preseason

FULL CONTACT DRILLS

LIMITED To reduce exposures to impacts

30 MIN
PER PRACTICE

75 MIN
PER WEEK Maximum

Preseason Practice Limits

No more than 1 per day.

Preseason practices should be limited to no more than 1 practice per day. No more than one live-action scrimmage is recommended per week. USA Football recommends that practices involving drills or activities considered to be full contact are not allowed on consecutive days. This includes the day following a game or live-action scrimmage. Full contact is defined as any drill or activity in which contact occurs at a competitive speed.

Please refer to **USA Football's Practice Time Guidelines** for practice frequency.

Use a Practice Planner

Manage teams and practice plans

Schedule practices and activities

Keep track of full contact limits. Share practice plan with others. No more than one full contact game or live-action scrimmage is recommended per week. In postseason, a minimum of three days should lapse between full contact games. USA Football recommends that practices involving drills or activities considered to be full contact are not allowed on consecutive days. This includes the day following a game or live-action scrimmage. Full contact is defined as any drill or activity in which contact occurs at a competitive speed.

Strategize

Plan when to teach or compete and when to adjust contact to promote a better experience for players.

Assign a level of contact to every drill

Plan when to teach or compete and when to adjust. Proper usage of the Levels of Contact system helps players improve their contact skills at a high level while instilling confidence. Employing the Levels of Contact system also helps reduce player fatigue, which can advance player safety.

Regular Season Recap

PRACTICES PER WEEK

Reduce exposures to full contact impacts

Limit Thud and Live Action drills

Please refer to **USA Football's Practice Time Guidelines** for practice frequency.

30 MIN
FULL CONTACT DRILLS LIMIT
PER PRACTICE

60 MIN
MINUTES
PER WEEK

**** 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.**