

Tackle Rule Modifications for Youth Football

By: Tim Enger, BPE, MA

The following are suggested entries into the Canadian Amateur Rule Book for Tackle Football (CARBTF) dealing with modifications to the rules for two levels of Minor Football with some added adaptations for High School and Midget Football. This is incorporating concepts within Football Canada's Long Term Athlete Development Model (LTAD) and the levels described within. The two levels of Minor Football will be considered:

U13 – the game as it is played at the basic entry level of football (LTAD Level – Learn To Train)

U15 – the game as it is played at the transition level between entry and competitive football occurring at High School/Midget and beyond. (LTAD Level – Train to Train)

High School/Midget – the game as it is meant to be played as adults with only minor alterations to it (LTAD Level – Learn to Compete)

Rule 1 – Conduct of the Game

Section 1 – The Field

U13 – Play at this level should be encouraged to go 6-a-side or 9-a-side with much smaller rosters therefore the Field should then be adapted to the Rule Books for 6 and 9-a-side.

(Rational: Less kids on the field = more action for everyone.)

U15 – No adaptations

Section 2 – The Ball

Article 1 – Description

Three different dimensions should be described in the CARBTF dealing with entry level youth football, transition level ball, and competitive football.

U13 – a ball roughly the size of the Wilson TDJ

U15 – a ball roughly the size of the Wilson TDY

All other levels – as described in the CARBTF

(Rational: Smaller hands deserve smaller footballs to encourage the development of the passing game.)

Section 3 – The Game

Article 1 – Length of Game

A more descriptive ruling needs to be listed here since the Rule Modifications for youth football are all over the place in Canada. It also needs to be listed in this article and not referenced to a Rule Modification Section in the back of the book

U13 – The Game shall consist of 60 minutes of playing time broken down to four quarters of 15 minute periods. The timing shall not follow Rule 1, Section 5, rather the timing of these quarters shall be straight time with three plays given (not including covert situations) once time expires in the second and fourth quarters. See Rule 1, Section 5 for injury and timeout adaptations.

(Rational: the skill level of the volunteer timers and inexperience of the officials normally sent to this level are hampered by the timing rules especially when you are “herding cats” with the athletes at the youngest levels. Straight time can even be timed by the referee if no scoreclock is available opening up many venues for play at this level and the three plays takes away any “clock management” stress at the end of the halves. Clock management is a lot to expect of the youngest athletes and beginner coaches and should be eliminated.)

U15/High School/Midget – The game shall consist of 48 minutes of playing time broken down to four quarters of 12 minute periods and shall follow the timing outlined in Rule 1, Section 5.

(Rational: It's in the Rule Book as an option right now but should be formalized.)

Article 4 – Half Time

U13 – At the end of the second period, a 10 minute rest period shall be allowed

(Rational: Rest is important but there are not a lot of adjustments you can do at the half with this age level that their attention spans can process. 20 minutes is too long)

U15/High School/Midget – At the end of the second period, a 15 minute rest period shall be allowed.

(Rational: Better level to adapt and make usage of the half time break but 20 minutes is still too long.)

Section 4 – Teams

Article 3 – Team Captains

(C) U13 – all choices listed as being made by captains should be referred to the head coaches of the teams rather than the assigned captains to limit confusion and speed things along.

(Rational: Giving “options” to a 9 year old in his first year of football and asking him to choose on the spot is difficult and is usually referred to the coaches anyways. Some progression may be made by the time they are 12 with experience but best to leave those decisions with the adults.)

Section 5 – Timing

Article 2 – Time Stops

U13 – As listed in the modifications for Section 3, Article 1, the 15 minute quarters shall run straight time with the following exceptions:

- a) time outs
- b) injuries (in order to eliminate fake injuries a maximum of 1 minute shall be run off the clock prior to it being stopped during an injury situation that requires paramedical staff to enter the field of play to assess a player)
- c) the Referee feels it necessary to suspend play – defective equipment, lengthy measurements, etc.

(Rational: Formalizes what was presented in Rule 1, Section 3, Article 1)

Article 3 – End of Period

U13 – As listed in the modifications for Rule 1, Section 3, Article 1, the first and third quarters will expire at the completion of the last play started before the straight time runs out barring penalty. The second and fourth quarters will feature 3 more plays upon expiration of the straight time. They will not include converts and will be subject to all the rules of the game, especially the 20 second rule to get the ball into play. Teams may call time outs during this time but it will not add another play to the 3 play limit.

(Rational: Formalizes what was presented in Rule 1, Section 3, Article 1)

Article 4 – Time Out

U13 – During time outs a maximum of two coaches may run out to the huddle to conference with the players there rather than bring players to the bench.

(Rational: At the youngest levels it is easier to bring the coach to the huddle than the huddle to the coach. Time outs are short and should be the most productive they can be so allowing two coaches onto the field will offer this opportunity.)

Section 7 – Live Ball

Article 2 – Injury Stoppage

U13 – See adaptations to Rule 1, Section 5, Article 2

Section 13 – Non-Players

Article 3 – Time-Out Conferences

U13 – See adaptations for Rule 1, Section 5, Article 4

Rule 2 – Officials

Section 1 – Designation of Officials

Article 1 – Field Officials

A minimum level of officiating should be listed in this section for all levels:

U13 – A minimum of 3 officials to conduct the game

U15 – A minimum of 4 officials to conduct the game

High School/Midget/Senior – A minimum of 5 officials to conduct the game

CIS/Junior – A minimum of 6 officials to conduct the game

Note: in situations where the minimum number of officials is not available, for any reason at any level, the game may continue based on an agreement to accept the number of officials present by the head coaches of both teams. Otherwise the game is postponed. No game may take place without a minimum of 2 certified officials present and the ranking official in that situation has the right to postpone if it is felt that the game can not be safely conducted.

(Rational: There is a lot of confusion across Canada about how many officials are acceptable vs. how many are available. This will give some formal guidelines with the flexibility to ensure games go as scheduled.)

Section 3 – Referee

Article 6 – 3 Minute Warning

U13 – no need for this in U13 timing

(Rational: Formalizes what was presented in Rule 1, Section 3, Article 1)

Article 7 – End of Period

U13 – refer to adaptation to Rule 1, Section 5, Article 3

(Rational: Formalizes what was presented in Rule 1, Section 3, Article 1)

Section 10 – Timekeeper and Scorer

Article 2 – Timekeeper’s Responsibility

U13 – refer to adaptation to Rule 1, Section 5, Article 3

(Rational: Formalizes what was presented in Rule 1, Section 3, Article 1)

Rule 3 – Scoring

Section 2 - Definition

Article 5 – Convert

U13 – reverse the point values for (a) and (b) so that a kicked convert is worth 2 points and a convert ran or passed into the end zone is worth 1 point.

(Rational: kicking converts at the youngest level has an “Act of God” feel to it if successful, so many programs do not teach or encourage this after touchdowns due to its infrequency of being successful. Switching the point values will encourage a very important part of the game to be taught at the youngest levels and attempted during games.)

Rule 4 – Scrimmage

Section 1 – Definitions

Article 4 – Line and Backfield

U13 – Some leniency should be given in the interpretation of this rule for the youngest levels. A bowed out continuous line with the offensive tackles exceeding the one yard limit is very common at this age level and should have a warning system attached to it prior to penalization of Team A.

All other levels – Penalize at written

(Rational: Self explanatory)

Section 2 – Method of Scrimmage

Article 4 – Time Count

U13 – Some leniency should be given in the interpretation of this rule for the youngest levels. A warning system and count down by the referee should be utilized prior to penalization of Team A.

All other levels – Penalize at written

(Rational: Self explanatory)

Section 2 – Requirements for Legal Scrimmage

Article 2 – Player Requirements

U13 – Any defensive player on Team B prior to the snap may not line up directly in front of Team A's center on any play. This zone would be from either side of the center's shoulder pads. *(Rational: snapping the ball and moving to a block is difficult enough to learn without someone directly in front of you. Centers should be allowed to learn their craft at this level without the threat of being hit immediately once they commence snapping the ball. This applies to ALL plays – not just the special teams long snaps.)*

U15/High School/Midget – Any defensive player on Team B prior to the snap may not line up directly in front of Team A's center on punt or field goal/convert attempts. This zone would be from either side of the center's shoulder pads.

(Rational: more flexibility for defensive fronts should be allowed however the center should still be protected during long snaps in punting and field goal/convert attempts)

U13/U15 – Part (b) regarding motion should not apply at this level. All backfield motion is allowed but not the ends on the LOS.

(Rational: the movement of the static ends on the LOS is an advanced strategy. Defences have enough to contend with at that level without this plus the implementation of this may be very difficult for players to pull off at the youngest levels and subject to increase penalization.)

Article 3 – Identification and Position

U13 – Any player designated as a running back (i.e. line-up in the backfield between the offensive tackles) would be considered an ineligible receiver. Only players lined up outside the tackles would be eligible to receive passes.

(Rational: encourages more involvement of offensive players than the running backs who usually are the go-to guys. If you want to pass you have to get the ball to players other than your main contributors on offense)

U15 – Any player designated as a running back (i.e. lined up in the backfield between the offensive tackles) would be an eligible receiver for only those passes thrown and completed behind the LOS.

(Rational: encourages more involvement of offensive players than the running backs who usually are the go-to guys. The addition of screen passes is appropriate to this level but all downfield passing should go to someone else.)

Rule 6 – Passing

Section 4 – Forward Pass

Article 4 – Eligible Receivers

U13 – Any player designated as a running back (i.e. line-up in the backfield between the offensive tackles) would be considered an ineligible receiver regardless of which number is worn. Only players lined up outside the tackles would be eligible to receive passes.

(Rational: encourages more involvement of offensive players than the running backs who usually are the go-to guys. If you want to pass you have to get the ball to players other than your main contributors on offense)

U15 – Any player designated as a running back (i.e. lined up in the backfield between the offensive tackles) would be an eligible receiver for only those passes thrown and completed behind the LOS.

(Rational: encourages more involvement of offensive players than the running backs who usually are the go-to guys. The addition of screen passes is appropriate to this level but all downfield passing should go to someone else.)

Article 12 – Miscellaneous

(d) Illegal Defences

U13/15 – All defensive back/linebacker coverage on pass plays should be man to man with only the safety allowed to freelance. No zone defences will be allowed until the High School/Midget levels. The penalty will be assessed after one warning and will have the same weight as Defensive Pass Interference Penalties (L15).

(Rational: at the youngest levels, skill development should be the primary focus and having the players develop this type of defensive system will encourage skill development and limit the overkill in defensive system implementation which sometimes takes away from that.)

(See next page for Policy Statements)

Policy Statements

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In addition to the Rule Modifications it is suggested that Football Canada place Policy Statements within the CARBFTF to guide the conduct of all levels of the sport playing Tackle Football. These are issues that cannot be enforced by officials during games but should be used as a guideline for proper conduct of different levels across the nation. They would include:

a) Seasons of Play:

U13/15 & Midget: 10-14 weeks of continuous play including training camps and league post-season play. Separate Spring or other Team Training Camp programming is discouraged save for organizational camps prior to a summer break. In that case only one week of activity would be permitted. Attendance at private summer camps would be encouraged as well. Provincial post-league play may add no more than two weeks for U13/15 and no more than three weeks for Midget.

High School: As per the Provincial Governing Body of high school sports direction.

b) Number of Games:

U13/15 & Midget: 8-9 maximum regular season league games and no more than 3 league playoff games. Provincial playoffs are limited to three games post-league play.

High School: As per the Provincial Governing Body of high school sports direction.

c) Practices per week and times:

U13/15: Training Camps may feature as much as 5 practises per week for the first two weeks of the Season of Play but after that there should be no more than 3 practise a week. No multiple practise days should be permitted at this level. Practices should not exceed 90 minutes for U13 and 2 hours for U15.

High School/Midget: Training Camps may feature as much as 10 practises per week for the first two weeks of the Season of Play but after that there should be no more than 4 practise a week. Multiple practise days are permitted at this level. Practises should never exceed 2 hours.

d) Days before competition:

U13/15: It is recommended that 10 days and at least 6 practises take place prior to getting into any competition vs. an opponent outside your team. This includes joint practices, scrimmages, exhibition games.

High School/Midget: It is recommended that 5 days and at least 5 practises take place prior to getting into any competition vs. an opponent outside your team. This includes joint practices, scrimmages, exhibition games.

e) Specialization of Sport:

U13/15: It is recommended that players be actively encouraged to take up other sporting endeavours throughout the year and limit football participation strictly to the Season of Play.

High School/Midget: Players at this level may choose to specialize in football, however they should limit their on-field involvement to the Season of Play for their chosen level and focus on proper off-season training the rest of the year. Participation in other sporting endeavours at other times of the year is still a preferred option at this level.

f) Specialization of Position:

All levels: Football is a funny sport in that there are seven distinctly different skill sets that need to be taught (i.e QB, RB, REC, OL, DL, LB, & DB). Athletes at any level of tackle football normally gravitate towards certain positions on the basis of interest, body type, skill set, etc. Rotation of positions by the athletes throughout a season at the youngest levels may be an expectation of the parents who signed them up, but makes it very difficult to coach and conduct a functional team. This needs to be communicated very clearly by the coaches and administrators to both athlete and parent that are new to the sport regardless of what level they begin to play at. The key is to teach the fundamental movements and techniques at each position and link them together into play. Therefore different positions need to be taught differently and starting from scratch every week with a new batch of players is not workable for coaches.

g) Playing Time Considerations:

All levels: It must be strictly understood by coaches that nobody signs up to play a sport and sit on the bench. That being said football has a long history of first team, second team, scout team, etc. or whatever references can be made to the hierarchy on a teams roster. An appreciation for the goals of an individual athlete along with team goals need to be married in such a way as to foster the development of the athlete and his/her enjoyment of the sport while still respecting the needs of the team. Some guidelines for each level may include:

U13: any player who shows up to all practises in a given week must be scheduled to play in at least two quarters of the game that week, barring disciplinary or safety factors.

U15: any player who shows up to all practises in a given week must be scheduled to play in at least one quarter of the game that week, barring disciplinary or safety factors.

High School/Midget: There should be no playing time quotas at these levels but concern for involvement of all registered athletes should be a primary concern for coaches in game situations above and beyond the desire for a winning outcome.

h) Two-Way Play:

All Levels: Football is great sport in that of all the sports available to young men and women across the country it is one of the best at offering opportunities to be “on-field” due to the number of players necessary to play (i.e. 12-a-side in most cases). 24 different players can be operating on-field at the same time which makes us the envy of other sports. This benefit can be marginalized when coaches make the decisions to play their best players on both sides of the ball, thus limiting the number of players who actually participate in the game from their team. Therefore it is recommended that, with the exception of positions along the offensive and defensive lines, coaches make every effort to limit two way play. Each team is usually only blessed with so many lineman types so using them both ways may be necessary to even the playing field with opponents, however the other positions should be fairly well represented on the roster making it entirely possible to play without the need for two way players in those areas barring a severe limitation to roster size.

i) Cutting Players:

U13/U15 – the concept of elite or representative teams that “cut” or remove registered players from their roster, with no other alternative for them to play, strictly to foster a more competitive team should not exist at this level. Barring concerns for the athlete’s safety or severe lack of coaches, no player who signs up to participate on a community or school based football program should ever be cut. New or developmental teams need to be considered if there are too many athletes in one area for the teams offered.

High School/Midget – considering the level of competition at these levels the concept of removing athletes from the roster is acceptable providing an honest and fair evaluation of talent has been conducted to formulate the team, however opportunities such as JV or developmental squads should be considered if there are too many athletes in one area for the teams offered.

j) Offensive Considerations:

U13 – It is recommended that a standard set on offense featuring five linemen (not offset), four receivers, 2 running backs and one quarterback be used. The concept of several formations and sets causes coaches to spend too much time on system implementation and not enough on teaching fundamental movements and techniques. Football Canada also strongly encourages at least one attempted pass every 3-4 plays - depending on the situation (i.e. 2nd and 10 vs. 3rd and short). As per the modifications to the CARBTF (Rule 6, Section 4, Article 4) the running backs cannot be pass receivers at this level.

U15 – More varied sets and formations can be used and Football Canada still strongly encourages at least one attempted pass every 3-4 plays - depending on the situation (i.e. 2nd and 10 vs. 3rd and short). As per the modifications to the CARBTF (Rule 6, Section 4, Article 4), the running backs can only be pass receivers for passes behind the LOS.

k) Defensive Considerations:

U13/15 – All defensive back/linebacker coverage of receivers on pass plays should be man to man with only the safety allowed to freelance. No zone defences will be allowed until the High School/Midget levels. This is a modification to the CARBTF (Rule 6, Section 4, Article 12) that will carry a penalty of illegal defence. It is also a modification to the CARBTF that the offensive center not have anyone lined up against him prior to the snap (Rule 4, Section 2, Article 2) for ALL plays.

High School/Midget: It is also a modification to the CARBTF that the offensive center not have anyone lined up against him prior to the snap (Rule 4, Section 2, Article 2) for all punting and field goal/convert plays.

l) Special Team Considerations:

U13: The modification to the CARBTF (Rule 3, Section 2, Rule 5) switches the point values for converts in that a kicked convert be worth 2 points while a covert run or passed into the end zone is worth 1. This is done to encourage the kicking game as an important part of tackle football.

m) Medical Clearance to Play:

All Levels: Football is a contact sport and has inherent dangers to it. Although extremely rare in their occurrence, catastrophic injuries can occur therefore it is important to ascertain the health of the athlete going into the sport to strictly minimize and/or prevent undetected health issues

from contributing to their occurrence. Therefore a due diligence at each level is recommended as follows:

U13/15: It is recommended that as a part of their registration parents should indicate that the athlete has had a doctor's check-up within the time frame of the conclusion of the last football season up until the start of the current football season. No medical documentation needs to be present just the parents indication that an exam has taken place and the athlete is deemed healthy to play. Any contraindicative issues (i.e. asthma, severe allergies) should be noted as well and signed off by the parents.

High School/Midget: It is recommended that a complete medical check-up should be completed on all athletes at this level within the time frame of the conclusion of the last football season up until the start of the current football season, and they should provide written evidence of such at registration or prior to the opening of Training Camp. This may come in the form of a standard document created by the Provincial Football Association or simply a letter from the examining physician and should contain any contraindicative issues (i.e. asthma, severe allergies). In both cases it should be signed off by said physician to indicate the athlete is deemed healthy to play.

n) Paramedical Coverage and Concussion Policy:

All levels: It is recommended that a person with minimal qualifications of Athletic First Aid or equivalent be present at all team training, practise, and game situations where athletes are participating in football. This person should also have specific training in identifying and detecting concussions. At the highest levels of amateur football, being Junior, University, and Senior it is recommended that teams also contract the services of a doctor to be in association with the team. Football Canada recommends strongly that no one be allowed to return to play after having been suspected of experiencing a concussion unless they provide a written clearance from a doctor.