Scenario #1 – Flag Guarding

Play: 2nd down from the Team B 22 and ZLG is the Team B 20. The ball is snapped to A1 who takes the snap and makes a quick pass to A3. A3 runs through the defense towards the end zone. She slaps away the hand of a defensive player who attempts to deflag her at the 8 yard line. She runs to the 5 and makes a pitch to A5 who tries to reverse field but is deflagged at the Team B 10. What do we do?

Ruling: A3 committed a flag guarding violation at the Team B 8 yard line. This play is a running play. The penalty is 10 yards from the basic spot which is the end of the related run. The spot of enforcement is from the Team B 10 yard line, not from the Team B 8, which is where the violation occurred. The related run continues through a pitch because we never lose team possession throughout the play. The next play will be 1st down from the Team B 20, ZLG is the goal line.

Scenario #2 – Contact on the Line

Play: You are the referee for an intense game between two of the top teams at your school. Over the course of the previous plays, A4 and B1 have been increasingly rough during blocking and rushing near the line of scrimmage. You (the referee) have to make a decision on how to handle this situation quickly. What would you do?

Ruling: Communication during pre-game: did you address contact/screen blocking/rushing in your captain’s meeting?

Communication with players: “Guys, watch the contact,” “Guys, knock it off,” “Jimmy (your line judge), can you help me with the contact on the line, it is getting rough; let’s clean it up.”

Silent word: “Player, I have seen the contact, I will take care of it next time,” “Player, we are done with the contact, knock it off,” “Player, don’t start playing dirty.”

Communication with captain: “Chris, can you help me with your rusher? He is close to hurting your team.” “Chris, can you help me your blocker? He is going to hurt someone if he keeps this up.”

Penalty: Illegal contact, 10 yards from the basic spot. Against the offense, the basic spot is determined by the rest of the play (running or loose ball). Against the defense, the spot will basic spot will the previous spot.

Scenario #3 – Roughing the Passer

Play: Team A has the ball late in the 2nd half. Team A snaps the ball from the Team B 12 yard line. A1 takes the snap and rolls to her left. As A1 rolls out, B2 closes in. A1 stops to plant and throw and B2 cannot change her route and tries to avoid contact by spinning away but still attempts to deflag A1. In the attempt, B2 misses the flag and instead hits A1’s arm. The pass is a) dropped or b) caught by A7 in the end zone or C) caught by A7 in the end zone and time runs out during the play.

Ruling: B2 has committed roughing the passer against A1. Roughing the passer can be enforced from either the previous spot or from the end of the run on a completed pass.

In A, the pass was incomplete and the penalty will be enforced from the basic spot which is the previous spot. The next play will be 1st and goal from the 6 yard line. The penalty yardage for roughing the passer is 10 yards, but because of our location on the field, we can only enforce a penalty half the distance to the goal line and this penalty also includes an automatic first down.
In B, the touchdown is scored and the penalty will be enforced from the succeeding spot which will be the try or, after the Try, at the 14 yard line. REMEMBER to let the offense know that they have the option on where to enforce the penalty because fouls by the defense on a score will be tacked on. With either decision, the penalty can only be enforced only half the distance; so the try will be from half the distance as chosen by the offense or after the Try from the 14 yard line.

In C, the touchdown is scored and the penalty will be enforced from the succeeding spot which will be the try or, after the Try, at the 14 yard line to resume the 2nd half of play. REMEMBER to let the offense know that they have the option on where to enforce the penalty because fouls by the defense on a score will be tacked on. With either decision, the penalty can only be enforced only half the distance; so the try will be from half the distance as chosen by the offense or after the Try from the 14 yard line.

Scenario #4 – Downfield Blocking

Play: Team A has the ball 1st and goal from the Team B19 yard line. A1 takes the snap and rolls out of the pocket to his right. A3, running his route a) and picks off B2 who is covering A5; b) and sets up for a screen block at the 4 yard line; c) and A1 takes off for the end zone and A3 uses his chest to push B2 off the field 3 yards deep in the end zone and A1 scores a touchdown.

Ruling: Contact downfield is a tricky call for most officials, especially young officials new to the game. You have to remember that flag football does not make exceptions for contact anywhere on the field, so the principles for contact at the LOS are the same for the contact downfield. Screen blocking is legal if performed properly.

In A, A3 has committed Offensive Pass Interference by picking the defender. Offensive pass interference starts at the snap because the offense knows the play has an advantage over the defense. The penalty is 10 yards from the basic spot which is the previous spot because it is a loose ball play. This penalty also carries a loss of down, so the next play would be 2nd down from the Team B 29, ZLG is still the goal line.

In B, A3 has violated no rule and has properly executed a legal downfield screen block.

In C, A3 has not executed a legal screen block. A3 should be penalized for illegal contact because he did not maintain a legal screening position and instead driven his player out of bounds and gained an advantage by keeping B2 from being able to make a play on A1. A3 should be penalized for illegal contact, 10 yards enforced from the basic spot which is the end of run for running plays. This play is unique because of the penalty by Team A in the Team B end zone. Do not get flustered or confused by the location. You still simply have foul during a running play. Using the All-But-One principle, the spot of enforcement will be the end of the run, which ends at the goal line. Your spot of enforcement is therefore the goalline. You will mark off 10 yards, replay the down. The next play is 1st and ZLG is the goalline from the Team B 10 yard line.

Scenario #5 – Illegal Shift

Play: Team A breaks their huddle with :11 seconds on the play clock. As they line up on the LOS, the LJ tries to instruct A5 on the far side of the field to back up. While A5 is backing up to get on the LOS, A4 is in motion. A2 snaps the ball before A4 gets set.

Ruling: Team A has committed an illegal shift. The offense can have as many players in motion or shifting at the same time as they wish, but all players in motion or shifting must become set for one full count prior to the ball being snapped. Even if a player is listening to an official and trying to fix a problem, all players must become set prior to the snap. Illegal shift is a MISSTEP foul (simultaneous to the snap) so the play should be allowed to continue. The official should “throw and go,” so throw the flag in the air and continue to officiate as normal. When
the play is over, the defense can then choose to accept or decline the penalty. If accepted, the basic spot is the previous spot, 5 yards, replay the down.

**Scenario #6 – Too Many Players on the Field**

**Play:** Team A has 4th down from their own 16 yard line and ZLG is the 20. They have elected to punt the ball. Prior to the snap, Team B is confused as to who is supposed to be on the field for the return. B6 is screaming for one more on, so B8 steps on and starts to run towards the LOS. However, B7 recounts and sees they have too many players. B7 starts running for the sideline. The ball is snapped.

**Ruling:** This is a play that could easily happen and be missed/ignored by most officials. Every official should be counting their players prior to every play and realize that an 8th player has entered the field. This is illegal participation, a MISHAP foul (simultaneous to the snap) and is a live ball foul. The official will “throw and go,” throw the flag in the air and continue to officiate the play. In this play, the defense has essentially given Team A the first down as Team A will have the choice of accepting the penalty of 10 yards from the previous spot and gaining a much needed 1st down or decline the penalty and take the result of the play.

**Exception:** If a player is stepping off of the field at the snap, let it go. When in doubt, the player is off the field.

**Scenario #7 – Illegal Formation**

**Play:** Team A is trailing 26-21 with :05 seconds left in the 2nd half. They have the ball 1st and goal from the Team B 16 yard line. The clock is stopped because of the 1st down from the previous play where A6 made an amazing catch and run but was deflagged inbounds. Team A lines up to run their next play. A1, A2, and A3 are all in the backfield as passer and blockers. A1 sends A4 in motion and A5 snaps the ball while A4 is in motion. A1 throws a strike to A6 who then pitches to A7 who runs it in for a TD. The game clock runs out. Why is Team A not celebrating their win?

**Ruling:** Team A was not in a legal formation to start the play. Four (4) players are required to be set on the LOS at the snap. However, with A1, A2, and A3 in the backfield, that leaves the remaining four players of Team A on the LOS and they must all be set to be legal. A4 was in motion, meaning he is not set. This is a MISHAP foul, so the official would “throw and go,” meaning you would throw the flag in the air, but then continue to officiate the play as normal. The defense has the option to accept or decline this penalty. If accepted, it would be marked off from the basic spot which is the previous spot, 5 yards, replay the down, one untimed down for an accepted penalty. A half cannot end on an accepted penalty unless it carries a loss of down, which this does not.

**Scenario #8 – Pass Interference**

**Play:** This game has been increasingly rough over the past few minutes and the referee has spoken to her other officials about cleaning up the game. A4 and B6 have been matched up all day and are both athletic, competitive players. Team A has the ball 3rd and ZLG is the 40 from the Team A 32. At the snap, a) A4 pushes off of B6 and catches a quick slant for a 7 yard gain; b) B6 plays close to the line and keeps A4 from getting off the line quickly but there is no pass and A1 is deflagged at the Team A 27; c) A4 runs a 10 yard out and both players go up for a catch but both players fall to the ground in a pile.

**Ruling:** The referee has done what she feels is necessary to alert fellow officials to the need to clean a game up. Hopefully, her other officials will be more alert on the next few plays and make a call that will help clean up a game. Calls that don’t help a game only hurt the officials, so make calls that will have an impact on improving your game. Don’t just throw a flag to throw one.

*In A, A4 has committed offensive pass interference because the restrictions on offensive pass interference start at the snap. The offense knows their play and has an advantage, so pushing off of a defender allows an offensive
player another advantage. The penalty would be enforced from the basic spot which is the previous spot for loose ball plays. 10 yards from the previous spot and loss of down, making the next play 4th and ZLG is still the 40 from the Team A 22.

In B, B6 has “chucked” a receiver off of the line. This is not allowed in the game of flag football and is more common from young players who don’t know the game as well as veteran players. On this play, A1 is unable to throw the pass to A4, so we have no loose ball period as A1 is deflagged at the Team A 27. Our basic spot of enforcement for a running play is the end of the run, so the penalty will be enforced 10 yards from the 27, next play will be 3rd and ZLG is the Team B 40 from the Team B 37. Remember, defensive pass interference does not start until the ball is released for a legal forward pass.

In C, this play is seen in every game of flag football. Players are getting more athletic and quicker to the ball. Players who are attempting to play the ball should have the right to do so. In this play, B6 has just as much of a right to the ball as A4, so we should have a no call. Again, we don’t want to throw a flag just to throw it. We want quality calls that improve our game, not calls that are very gray. This would be a great play for game management with the wing official moving in and the back judge coming over to assist with getting players up and back to the huddle. Phrases like “Great play guys, easy up,” or “Way to play the ball guys. Back to the huddle” can really make a difference in how players react to a play like this.

Note: Judging a player’s intent is very difficult. An effective way to make a proper call on this type of play (Play C) is to use some basketball philosophy. Who had better position? Was the defender in a legal position? Did someone go through another player to make the play? If a player is playing through the body or displacing an opponent, then they have gained an advantage illegally.

Scenario #9 – Co-Rec Open/Close

Play: 1st and goal from Team A 14 after a Team B score. Male A1 takes the snap and drifts back. He pump fakes a pass to female A4 who runs a 5 yard out. Male A1 then launches the ball to male A6 streaking down the left sideline. Male A6 catches the pass and advances the ball to the Team B 13 yard line where he is deflagged. Before the referee begins to move the pucks after the great play, he notices a flag on the ground at the line of scrimmage. A) The LJ comes in and reports illegal contact on the offense by female A2 at the Team A 12 during the pass; b) LJ reports illegal contact on the defense by female B6 at the Team A 12 after the catch; c) the LJ reports illegal forward pass by male A1. What do we do?

Ruling: Co-Rec is a great game that takes as much, if not more, strategy and skill for all players. The rules of co-rec parallel those of men’s and women’s flag football, yet officials are not clear on the minor differences. Mistakes by officials are generally related to oversight of open/close status of plays. However, with minor mistakes, we open ourselves up to greater problems.

In A, the LJ reports illegal contact by female A2 at the Team A 12. This contact occurred during a loose ball period. Remember that all play preceding a loose ball play becomes part of the loose ball play. The foul is enforced from the Team A 12 using the All-But-One Principle (any foul by team A behind the basic spot of enforcement is enforced from the spot of the foul; or stiff the offense). The penalty yardage is 10 yards, but we can never enforce a penalty more than half the distance to the goalline, so mark off 6 yards only (your mechanic is to mark the distance from the pucks to the goalline, then mark the distance from the goalline to half that distance, use your LJ to mark that spot, then retrieve your pucks and set the next play.) The next play will be 1st and ZLG 20 from the Team A 6 yard line. The open/closed status of a play is not effected by penalty enforcement, so the next play will change from being open to now being closed because of the male to male completion.

In B, the LJ reports illegal contact on the defense by female B6 at the Team A 12 after the catch. It is important to note on this call that the LJ’s responsibility after the snap is different in co-rec than it is in men’s and women’s
games. The LJ is required to stay home at the LOS on all plays so as to rule on location of a completed pass near the LOS. This LJ continued scanning her area of coverage and was able to make a quality call. This penalty is enforced from its basic spot which is the end of the run because the foul occurred during the running portion of the play. The penalty yardage is 10 yards, but again we can never enforce a penalty more than half the distance to the goal, so we can only enforce the penalty 6 ½ yards (your mechanic is to mark the distance from the pucks to the goalline, then mark the distance from the goalline to half that distance, use your LJ to mark that spot, then retrieve your pucks and set the next play.) The next play will be 1st and ZLG is the goalline. The play will be closed due to the male to male completion and penalty enforcement does not effect open/closed status of a play.

In C, the LJ has reported illegal forward pass by male A1. This is a tricky call because this call does not fall under the LJ’s responsibility even in co-rec. It is the Referee’s call on illegal forward passes that are close to the LOS. The referee needs to keep their 7-and-7 distance from the passer at all times and if the pass is near the LOS, the referee needs to watch the plant spot and then move in and see the location in relation to the LOS. In this play, the referee and LJ need to come together and discuss the play and who saw what. This is where communication is crucial to successfully calling a play and enforcing to the teams that you are a crew. It is between the two officials to make the correct call. The official with primary responsibility needs to have the final call, but take into account the evidence provided by your fellow official. IF IN DOUBT, THE PASS IS LEGAL. If the penalty is enforced and accepted by Team B, the penalty yardage is 5 yards from the basic spot of enforcement which is the end of the run because illegal forward passes are classified as running plays. Illegal forward pass also includes loss of down, so the next play would be 2nd and ZLG 20 from Team A9. The next play would be open.

**Scenario #10 – Co-Rec Illegal Forward Pass**

**Play:** Team A has the ball at the Team B 32 and it is 3rd and ZLG 20 and the play is closed. Female A2 takes the snap and makes a quick pass from the Team B 37 to male A1 at the Team B 34 behind the LOS. Male A1 a) is deflagged immediately behind the LOS or b) advances the ball through the LOS and is deflagged at the Team B 28.

**Ruling:** In A, the play is legal and the next play will be 4th and ZLG 20. As male A1 did not advance the ball through the LOS, there is not an infraction. The 4th down play will be closed. To open a play, 3 criteria must be met: 1) legal forward pass, 2) female involvement either passing or receiving, 3) positive yardage must be gained.

In B, the play is illegal. If a female passer completes a forward pass to a male receiver behind the LOS on either an “open” or “closed” play and any team A male runs beyond the LOS, it is an illegal forward pass. Remember, anytime you have a female passer who completes a legal forward pass near the LOS, it is crucial that the referee marks the spot of the pass with their bean bag. The penalty is illegal forward pass; 5 yards form the **spot of the pass** and loss of down. The next play would be 4th and ZLG 20 from the Team A 38, double sticks, and the next play is closed.

**Scenario #11 – Oops, Inadvertent Whistle**

**Play:** Team A has the ball at the Team B 16 yard line. It is 3rd and ZLG is the goalline. There are :05 seconds remaining in the game and Team A is trailing team B 21-20. A1 takes the snap and darts towards the LOS. A1 takes a step back and throws a strike to A4 at the 5 yard line. A4 is bobbling the ball as he tried to cut up field. B5 deflags A4 at the 3 yard line. A4 finally controls the ball after the deflag and scores a touchdown. Time expires. What do we if a) an official kills the play prior to A4 securing the ball; b) an official does not kill the play until A4 secures the ball but before he scores; or c) an official kills the play after the score.

**Ruling:** Inadvertent whistles are a part of officiating and will happen at the most inopportune times in some cases. Any person who has officiated more than a handful of games has blown an inadvertent whistle at some point in their career. If this happens, own up to the mistake and work harder to not make it in the future. Remember, if you ignore your inadvertent whistle, you have made two mistakes on a single play instead of one. It is crucial that all
officials remember that you need to let your mind digest what your eyes have seen. Do not be in a rush to blow the whistle and kill a play.

*In A and B*, the official has blown an inadvertent whistle. In A, the ball has never been secured by a player, therefore we have killed a loose ball play. In B, the ball is secured and flag belt removed, but the play should still be live. In both cases, the first thing the official should do is blow another whistle and another until the play is stopped. The official needs to report the inadvertent whistle to the referee and the options given to the last team in possession are replay the down or accept the result of the play until the whistle. In both plays, the offense will more than likely replay the down because time had expired otherwise.

*In C*, the play was called correctly. The defense will more than likely argue, so communication skills and having patience will be crucial. If you are 100% sure of your call, you need to be ready to explain it. The rest of your crew should also be ready to support you.