



THE PLAY STANDARD | SPORT ADAPTATIONS

Invasion Sports

Soccer, Basketball, and Flag Football

All thirty-six lessons, adapted to the invasion-sport family

Document 7 of 12 | Version 1.0

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About This Document

The pillar documents teach the coach what a value is and how to run the frame. This document teaches the coach what that value looks like on a shared field where both teams occupy the same space and play does not stop. It contains no new values and no new lessons.

A coach reads the lesson in the pillar document, then reads the same lesson code here before the session. The framing sentence, the questions, and the carry-it-home challenge all come from the pillar document. Only the moments change.

Why These Three Sports Are One Family

Soccer, basketball, and flag football are structurally the same game. Both teams occupy one shared space, possession changes continuously, play does not stop, and an official rather than a player usually makes the call. That structure determines what character looks like.

- Because play is continuous, there is no natural pause in which to recover from a mistake. A child has to reset while the game carries on around them, which is materially harder than resetting between points in a net sport.
- Because the space is shared, contact is constant and retaliation is always one second away. Emotional control is tested here more than anywhere else in the curriculum.
- Because most of the useful work happens away from the ball, these sports teach service and teamwork better than any other family. Screens, decoy runs, covering, and pressing all help somebody else and appear in no statistic.
- Because an official is present, how a child treats authority becomes visible in a way it never is in a self-officiated sport.

In a net sport a child is asked to be honest. In an invasion sport a child is asked to be useful when nobody is looking at them. Both are character. They are not the same lesson.

How to Use This Document

1. Read the day's lesson in the pillar document. That is where the script lives.
2. Read the same lesson code here. Carry the three moments in your head.
3. Check the sport variant line for what differs in your specific sport.
4. Check the across-the-bands line for the age in front of you.
5. Run the session. Name one moment out loud, by name, within seconds of it happening.

Watch away from the ball. The single most useful habit in this family is looking at the four or five players who do not have the ball. The ball takes care of attention on its own. Effort, service, communication, and inclusion are all visible only off the ball, and a coach who watches the ball will miss every one of them.

Sport Specifications

Every figure below comes from the sport's national governing body. Where a governing body publishes nothing, this document says so rather than inventing a standard.

Soccer

Governed by U.S. Soccer's Player Development Initiatives, published 2016 and reissued 2017. PLAY band is assigned by the child's age; the game format is assigned by the governing body.

Format	PLAY Band	Players	Field (yds)	Goal	Ball
4v4 (U6 to U8)	Sprouts and Climbers	4v4, no goalkeepers	25-35 by 15-25	4 ft by 6 ft	Size 3
7v7 (U9 to U10)	Climbers	6 plus keeper	55-65 by 35-45	6.5 ft by 12 ft recommended	Size 4
9v9 (U11 to U12)	Climbers	8 plus keeper	70-80 by 45-55	7 ft by 21 ft	Size 4
11v11 (U13 to U14)	Summit	10 plus keeper	Full	8 ft by 24 ft	Size 5 at U14

Rules That Are Safety Rules

Heading. Prohibited entirely for players aged 11 and under, in games and in practice. Permitted in games at 12U and 13U but limited in practice to thirty minutes per week and no more than fifteen to twenty headers per player per week. The rule keys to the player's actual age, not the team's age group, so a ten-year-old playing up on a 12U team must not head at all. Foundation programs do not teach or permit heading in any band. Our oldest soccer age is the only one where it is legal, the evidence shows a heading ban does not eliminate concussion, and a blanket no-heading policy is enforceable by a volunteer.

The build-out line. At 7v7, when the goalkeeper has the ball in hand, the opposing team must retreat behind the build-out line. The keeper may pass, throw, or roll the ball into play. Punts and drop kicks are not allowed and are punished by an indirect free kick from the spot. Players cannot be offside between the halfway line and the build-out line.

Movable goals. The Consumer Product Safety Commission documented at least twenty-one deaths from tipping movable soccer goals between 1979 and 1994, and roughly one hundred and twenty falling-goal emergency room injuries per year. All movable goals must be anchored at all times with a minimum of two anchors, and most incidents occurred when goals were unattended. At 4v4, Foundation programs use pop-up or cone goals and eliminate the risk entirely.

Age-group cutoff change. US Youth Soccer, US Club Soccer, and AYSO are moving from birth-year to seasonal-year age groups, effective with the 2026-27 registration year. The cutoff was announced as September 1 and subsequently revised to August 1 through July 31. This is live now and affects how children are grouped.

Basketball

Governed by the USA Basketball and NBA Youth Basketball Guidelines. Note that their youngest official band starts at age seven. There is no USA Basketball standard for ages three to six, which is one reason the Movement Foundation program exists.

Age	PLAY Band	Ball	Basket	Court	Three-point line
7 to 8	Climbers	Size 5 (27.5 in)	8 ft	50 by 42 ft	None
9 to 11	Climbers	Size 6 (28.5 in)	9 ft	74 by 50 ft	None
12 to 14	Climbers and Summit	Size 7 boys, size 6 girls	10 ft	84 by 50 ft	19 ft 9 in
Grades 9 to 12	Summit	Size 7 boys, size 6 girls	10 ft	94 by 50 ft	22 ft 2 in

The Developmentally Restrictive Rules

These are the provisions most often ignored in recreational leagues, and they are the ones that make the game teachable.

Rule	Ages 7 to 8	Ages 9 to 11	Ages 12 to 14
Set defense	Player-to-player only	Player-to-player only	Coach's discretion
Pressing	Not allowed at all	Period 4 and overtime only	Allowed, not when up 25 or more
Double-teaming	Not allowed	Not allowed	Coach's discretion
Stealing from a dribbler	Not allowed	Coach's discretion	Coach's discretion
Playing time	Equal, entire game	Equal, periods 1 to 3	Coach's discretion

- The rationale published by USA Basketball is worth quoting to parents. A smaller ball allows better control. A lower basket assists proper shooting form. No zone defense encourages movement and individual defensive skill. No three-point line prevents children adopting improper technique to reach range.
- The no-stealing-from-the-dribbler rule at ages seven and eight is the single most overlooked provision in recreational basketball, and removing it is what allows a beginner to dribble at all.

An unresolved conflict inside USA Basketball's own materials. The 2016 health guidelines recommend a game length of twenty to twenty-eight minutes for ages seven and eight. The 2018 standards specify four eight-minute periods, which is thirty-two minutes. These cannot both be satisfied. Foundation programs follow the shorter 2016 figure for the youngest players and treat the 2018 period structure as a ceiling.

Flag Football

Governed by the NFL FLAG Official Playing Rules, operated by RCX Sports. USA Football publishes a separate rule set branded USA Football 5v5, and an age-graded skill progression through its Football Development Model. The two rule sets are not identical. A program must pick one and state which it uses.

Parameter	Specification
Players	5 on 5
Field	25 yards wide by 70 yards long with 10-yard end zones, or 25 by 64 with 7-yard end zones
Game length	Two 24-minute halves on a continuous clock, 2-minute halftime
Pass clock	7 seconds for the quarterback to release
Blocking	Prohibited. No blocking or screening is allowed at any time.
Rush line	An imaginary line 7 yards from the line of scrimmage
Rushers	Maximum 2, and they must raise a hand to identify before the snap
No-run zone	5 yards before midfield and 5 yards before the end zone. The offense must pass.
Mouthguards	Mandatory at all times on the field. No exceptions.

- At 8U and below, there is no rushing the passer unless a legal handoff is executed in the backfield, and the no-run zone is eliminated entirely.
- At 7U and 6U, defenders must additionally line up at least two yards from the line of scrimmage before the snap.
- No governing body publishes a ball-size-by-age chart. The rulebook specifies ball color by division, not size. Manufacturer sizing is industry convention, not a standard.

A published specification conflict. The NFL FLAG rulebook PDF specifies a field 25 yards wide. The NFL FLAG website says 30 yards. Use 25, because the rulebook governs. Separately, do not use the NFL adult flag football rules PDF, which is a different rule set with a 50-yard field and a 20-minute rolling clock. Several league websites have already conflated the two.

The Safety Claim Foundation Staff May and May Not Make

Flag football is the sport in the portfolio where public language most needs discipline. The evidence supports one common claim and contradicts another.

Defensible	Not defensible
Non-contact by rule	Non-contact, or no contact
Substantially lower head impact exposure than tackle football, roughly 8 versus 378 impacts per season	Concussion-free, or no head injury risk
Injuries are typically minor and players return to play far faster than in tackle football	Safer than tackle football, stated without qualification
Roughly three quarters of youth flag injuries still come from accidental impact, which is why we coach body control and enforce mouthguards	No contact liability, or no collision risk

- The single prospective study comparing the two found flag’s overall injury rate higher than tackle, at 5.77 versus 2.60 per thousand exposures. It found no significant difference in severe injuries or concussions, and flag players returned to play roughly nine and a half times faster. It has never been replicated in either direction.
- An independent prospective study with athletic trainers on site found 74.5 percent of youth flag injuries resulted from direct impact, and that head, face, and neck was the most-injured region at 31.9 percent.
- The same study found girls sustained injuries at roughly three times the rate of boys, 12.8 versus 4.3 per thousand exposures. This is a single study with a small female sample, but it is the most program-relevant finding in the literature and should not be met with silence.
- Mouthguards are the most commonly skipped equipment item in informal play and the most consequential rule in the book given where the injuries land. Enforce without exception.

The Thirty-Six Lessons in Invasion Sports

Each entry gives three moments to watch for during play, a line on how the moment changes across the age bands, a note that applies to every sport in the family, and, where one sport genuinely differs, a sport variant naming it. The value, the framing, the questions, and the carry-it-home challenge are in the pillar document.

One moment is enough. A coach is not looking for all three. A coach is looking for one, and naming it out loud within seconds. Three are given so that a coach who does not see the first has two more available.

Pillar P — Perseverance in Invasion Sports

P1 — Effort

Moments to Watch For

- A player who sprints back on defense after losing the ball, when walking would go unnoticed.
- A player who keeps making runs they are not being passed to.
- A player who presses the ball when their team is already well behind.

Across the bands. Sprouts chase and keep chasing. Climbers work off the ball. Summit hold work rate when the result is decided.

In this family. Effort in an invasion sport is mostly work off the ball. It is invisible unless the coach deliberately looks away from the ball.

Sport variant. Basketball: the transition sprint after a turnover. Soccer: the recovery run. Flag football: the receiver who runs a full route on a play designed for somebody else.

P2 — Trying Again

Moments to Watch For

- A player who is beaten badly and immediately closes down the next attacker.
- A player who misses badly and asks for the ball on the next possession.
- A player who loses the ball and wins it straight back.

Across the bands. Sprouts get up and rejoin. Climbers reset within seconds. Summit re-engage rather than hiding.

In this family. The failure is public and continuous here. There is no natural pause, so the reset happens while play carries on. That makes this harder than in net sports and worth naming loudly.

P3 — Mistakes

Moments to Watch For

- A player who names their own error at the next stoppage rather than looking away.
- A player who adjusts their positioning after being beaten the same way twice.
- A player who asks a teammate what they should have done.

Across the bands. Sprouts shrug it off and keep playing. Climbers name it. Summit separate a decision error from an execution error.

In this family. Errors are public and immediate here, and the game does not stop to let a child process one.

Sport variant. Basketball: the defender who changes their stance after being crossed over. Soccer: the fullback who tucks in after being beaten on the inside.

P4 — Finishing

Moments to Watch For

- A player who keeps their shape and effort through the last two minutes.
- A player who plays a lost game at full pace to the whistle.
- A player who finishes the run rather than pulling up when the ball goes elsewhere.

Across the bands. Sprouts play to the whistle. Climbers hold intensity late. Summit hold standards in the final third of a session.

In this family. Fatigue is the variable here. Watch the last five minutes, not the first five.

P5 — Hard Things

Moments to Watch For

- A player who takes the harder defensive assignment without being told to.
- A player who uses their weaker foot or weaker hand when the strong one was available.
- A player who volunteers for the position nobody wants.

Across the bands. Sprouts stay with the difficult task. Climbers choose the harder option out loud. Summit deliberately train a weakness in front of peers.

In this family. The hard job in a shared-space sport is usually a defensive one, and it is always available to whoever volunteers.

Sport variant. Soccer: weak-foot use in live play, not just in drills. Basketball: guarding the best player. Flag football: playing the line rather than receiver.

P6 — Patience

Moments to Watch For

- A player who keeps possession and waits for the right pass rather than forcing it forward.
- A player who holds their defensive position instead of diving in.
- A player who stays with a new role through a stretch where it is not working.

Across the bands. Sprouts wait their turn. Climbers hold a change that is not paying off. Summit build play deliberately rather than forcing the outcome.

In this family. Patience in possession is the hardest version of this lesson, because the ball can always be kicked, thrown, or shot forward instead.

Sport variant. Soccer: the defender who jockeys instead of lunging. Basketball: the offense that swings the ball rather than settling for the first shot.

P7 — Courage

Moments to Watch For

- A player who asks for the ball in a tight spot when hiding was available.
- A player who takes the decisive shot or the decisive throw with the game on it.
- A player who steps in front of an attacker rather than backing off.

Across the bands. Sprouts get involved. Climbers try it in front of peers. Summit take the decisive action knowing it might fail publicly.

In this family. Hiding is easy in invasion sports because the ball can be avoided. Watch who is available to receive under pressure and who has quietly drifted out of the picture.

P8 — Focus

Moments to Watch For

- A player who tracks their assignment through a whole possession.
- A player who is still scanning when they do not have the ball.
- A player who recovers concentration after a whistle goes against them.

Across the bands. Sprouts watch the ball. Climbers recover attention quickly. Summit hold tactical awareness late in a session.

In this family. Off-ball focus is the tell in every invasion sport. The ball takes care of attention on its own. Watch the four players away from it.

P9 — Consistency

Moments to Watch For

- A player whose work rate in the last game matches the first.
- A player who does the unglamorous defensive work every single session.
- A player who is on time and ready without being chased.

Across the bands. Sprouts come ready every time. Climbers hold a daily habit. Summit keep standards without supervision.

In this family. The unglamorous repeated action — tracking back, boxing out, covering — is where consistency lives in every invasion sport.

Sport variant. Basketball: boxing out every possession. Soccer: tracking the runner every time, not just when it looks decisive.

Pillar L — Leadership in Invasion Sports

L1 — Responsibility

Moments to Watch For

- A player who manages their own kit, boots, mouthguard, and water without a parent.
- A player who carries the goals, cones, or balls without being asked.
- A player who takes responsibility for their own position rather than drifting.

Across the bands. Sprouts look after their own things. Climbers arrive prepared. Summit take over what an adult used to do for them.

In this family. Shared equipment and shared space mean responsibility here is collective before it is individual.

Sport variant. Flag football: the mouthguard is mandatory and is the most commonly skipped item in informal play. Make it a named responsibility, not a reminder.

L2 — Initiative

Moments to Watch For

- A player who organizes the group before the coach does.
- A player who starts the warm-up without prompting.
- A player who reorganizes the defense mid-game when something is not working.

Across the bands. Sprouts find something that needs doing. Climbers move before instruction finishes. Summit adjust the group without being asked to.

In this family. Invasion sports offer constant openings to organize other people, which makes initiative easier to practise than in any other family.

Sport variant. Basketball: calling out a switch. Soccer: the player who reorganizes the back line. Flag football: changing the coverage between plays.

L3 — Teamwork

Moments to Watch For

- A player who makes the extra pass when the shot was available.
- A player who does the running that creates space for someone else.
- A player who covers for a teammate who has been beaten.

Across the bands. Sprouts pass and include. Climbers make the person next to them more effective. Summit sacrifice their own numbers for the group outcome.

In this family. This family teaches teamwork better than any other in the curriculum. The decoy run, the screen, the cover — all of it is work that only helps somebody else.

L4 — Accountability

Moments to Watch For

- A player who owns a turnover instead of looking at the passer.
- A player who admits they were out of position.
- A player who does not gesture, shrug, or point after a goal or score is conceded.

Across the bands. Sprouts say it was theirs. Climbers own it without an explanation. Summit own the decision, not just the execution.

In this family. The shrug and the pointed finger are the tell in every invasion sport. Both are visible from the sideline and both are named moments.

L5 — Encouragement

Moments to Watch For

- A player who is the first voice after a teammate concedes or turns it over.
- A player who tells a teammate specifically what they did well.
- A player who picks up a teammate who has gone quiet.

Across the bands. Sprouts cheer. Climbers give specific credit. Summit encourage a competitor for their own position.

In this family. The huddle, the restart, and the walk back to position are the three moments when a teammate can be lifted.

Sport variant. Basketball: the help-side talk. Soccer: the voice after a defensive error. Flag football: the huddle between plays is the whole opportunity.

L6 — Communication

Moments to Watch For

- A player who calls for the ball early enough to be useful.
- A player who warns a teammate about pressure coming from behind.
- A player who organizes the group verbally without being the designated leader.

Across the bands. Sprouts use a loud clear voice. Climbers call early rather than late. Summit stay vocal when the group is losing or tired.

In this family. This family teaches communication best. Information arriving late is not information, it is commentary. Man on, help left, and I have got the seam are all named moments.

L7 — Service

Moments to Watch For

- A player who takes the defensive assignment nobody wants.
- A player who sets screens or makes decoy runs all session and takes no shots.
- A player who helps carry, set up, and pack down without being assigned.

Across the bands. Sprouts help without being asked. Climbers take the unglamorous job. Summit mentor with no audience and no credit.

In this family. Invasion sports are full of invisible work. Screens, blocks, decoy runs, and pressing all serve somebody else and do not show up in any statistic.

L8 — Integrity

Moments to Watch For

- A player who admits the ball came off them on a close call.
- A player who does not simulate contact or exaggerate a foul.
- A player who tells the official they were wrong in the opponent's favor.

Across the bands. Sprouts tell the true thing. Climbers make the honest call under pressure. Summit refuse an advantage that was available and unquestioned.

In this family. Unlike net sports, an official usually makes the call here. That makes integrity harder to see and more important to name when it appears. Simulation is the counter-example — name it as a failure, privately.

L9 — Influence

Moments to Watch For

- A player whose work rate visibly lifts the players around them.
- A player who stops the group complaining about a call.
- A player who sets the standard in the warm-up that everyone else matches.

Across the bands. Sprouts are copied by younger children. Climbers notice their effect on the group. Summit set the tone on purpose.

In this family. Body language travels faster in invasion sports than anywhere else, because everyone is inside the same space. One player's head dropping is visible to all ten.

Pillar A — Attitude in Invasion Sports

A1 — Respect

Moments to Watch For

- A player who does not argue with an official.
- A player who helps an opponent up.
- A player who takes a coaching correction without a comeback.

Across the bands. Sprouts show gentle hands and listening eyes. Climbers describe the behavior rather than the feeling. Summit give a weaker opponent the same seriousness as a stronger one.

In this family. Officials are present in invasion sports and absent in most net sports. How a child treats an official is the clearest respect signal available here.

A2 — Sportsmanship

Moments to Watch For

- A player who congratulates the opponent who beat them.
- A player who does not celebrate in a way aimed at another child.
- A player who plays a lost game cleanly to the end.

Across the bands. Sprouts shake hands. Climbers handle a loss within ninety seconds. Summit conduct themselves so opponents want to play them again.

In this family. Celebration is where this goes wrong in invasion sports. The line is between celebrating with your team and celebrating at the other child.

A3 — Manners

Moments to Watch For

- A player who thanks the official at the end.
- A player who greets the coach by name on arrival and departure.
- A player who introduces themselves to a new participant.

Across the bands. Sprouts say please and thank you. Climbers greet adults by name. Summit thank an official or facility staff member by name.

In this family. The handshake line exists by convention in soccer and flag football and rarely in pickup basketball. Build it deliberately where it is missing.

A4 — Gratitude

Moments to Watch For

- A player who thanks whoever set up the goals, cones, or field.
- A player who notices the field was lined or the court swept before they arrived.
- A player who thanks the parent who drove them without being prompted.

Across the bands. Sprouts thank the person who brought them. Climbers name something that was prepared for them. Summit thank somebody for work nobody mentions anymore.

In this family. Setting up an invasion-sport field is visible labor. Goals, cones, belts, and lines all had to be carried. Point at it before the session, not after.

A5 — Emotional Control

Moments to Watch For

- A player who is fouled hard and does not retaliate.
- A player who disagrees with a call and walks away from it.
- A player who is visibly frustrated and keeps their shape rather than chasing the ball everywhere.

Across the bands. Sprouts take one big breath. Climbers name their own tell. Summit hold composure in a high-stakes or unjust moment.

In this family. This family supplies the hardest version of this lesson in the curriculum. There is no pause, contact is constant, and retaliation is one second away. It is also where the lesson matters most.

A6 — Response

Moments to Watch For

- A player who keeps their standard after a call goes against them.
- A player who accepts an unwanted position and plays it properly.
- A player who adjusts without complaint to a poor pitch, wind, or an uneven field.

Across the bands. Sprouts choose their next thing on purpose. Climbers respond well to something outside their control. Summit refuse to let another person's conduct dictate their own.

In this family. Officiating is the recurring uncontrollable here. A child who can absorb a wrong call has learned something no drill teaches.

A7 — Inclusion

Moments to Watch For

- A player who passes to the teammate who has not touched the ball.
- A player who chooses the weaker player when picking teams.
- A player who adapts the game so a beginner can take part meaningfully.

Across the bands. Sprouts invite. Climbers choose the person usually chosen last. Summit make a new participant's first session easier.

In this family. Team selection and the pass count are the two visible inclusion signals. A child who never receives the ball has been excluded whether or not anyone said anything.

A8 — Listening

Moments to Watch For

- A player who executes a tactical instruction correctly the first time.
- A player who lets a teammate finish speaking in the huddle.
- A player who acts on information a teammate called out.

Across the bands. Sprouts show listening ears. Climbers repeat back what somebody said. Summit take a correction fully before responding.

In this family. Flag football's between-play huddle is the best listening laboratory in the curriculum. Use it.

A9 — Energy

Moments to Watch For

- A player who jogs to the restart rather than walking.
- A player who lifts the group when the score has gone against them.

- A player whose body language stays up through a difficult stretch.

Across the bands. Sprouts bring a ready face. Climbers notice whether they added energy or took it. Summit hold energy through a fatiguing block.

In this family. Body language is contagious inside a shared space. A dropped head spreads to the whole team within one possession.

Pillar Y — YOU in Invasion Sports

Y1 — Identity

Moments to Watch For

- A player who is the same person after a heavy defeat.
- A player who describes a poor performance without calling themselves bad.
- A player who does not define themselves by their position or their minutes.

Across the bands. Sprouts name something good about themselves that is not winning. Climbers separate played badly from am bad. Summit compete freely rather than protecting a reputation.

In this family. Selection and playing time make status visible in team sports in a way individual sports do not. Watch the child who was not picked first.

Y2 — Confidence

Moments to Watch For

- A player who asks for the ball in a situation they avoided last month.
- A player who takes on a defender they would previously have passed away from.
- A player who performs under pressure without asking for reassurance first.

Across the bands. Sprouts show what they can do. Climbers keep a list of proof. Summit rely on a record rather than on encouragement.

In this family. Invasion sports produce fewer countable reps than net sports. Use situations rather than numbers: the first time they took someone on, the first time they called for it under pressure.

Y3 — Fuel

Moments to Watch For

- A player who arrives having eaten something substantial.
- A player who chooses water over a sugary drink at the break.
- A player who talks about what food does rather than whether it is good or bad.

Across the bands. Sprouts name a fuel food. Climbers connect what they ate to how they felt an hour in. Summit manage their own pre-session nutrition.

In this family. Running load is high in every invasion sport. A child who has not eaten will fade in the last quarter and it will be visible. Never comment on any child's body while teaching it.

Y4 — Rest

Moments to Watch For

- A player who connects a flat session to a short night without prompting.
- A player who talks about a consistent bedtime rather than a random one.
- A player who prioritizes sleep over a screen and says so.

Across the bands. Sprouts name their bedtime routine. Climbers notice the difference sleep makes. Summit manage sleep around training and competition.

In this family. Weekend tournament formats stack games and destroy sleep. Ask about it. Do not diagnose.

Y5 — Body

Moments to Watch For

- A player who drinks at every break without being told.
- A player who takes the warm-up seriously rather than treating it as a delay.
- A player who describes movement they do outside of sessions.

Across the bands. Sprouts drink water and take a breath. Climbers describe their own activity outside sessions. Summit run a hydration or warm-up protocol on purpose.

In this family. Heat is the most likely severe-outcome risk in summer outdoor delivery, ahead of collision or head injury. The heat protocol governs first and the lesson second.

Y6 — Goals

Moments to Watch For

- A player who names a process goal rather than a result they cannot control.
- A player who works their stated goal without being directed to.
- A player who reports back on progress from a previous session.

Across the bands. Sprouts say one thing they want to get better at. Climbers pick a goal they control. Summit structure a session around a stated objective.

In this family. Team results are the wrong goal here because a child does not control them. Push toward individual process goals: five successful presses, weak foot only, no fouls conceded.

Y7 — Self-Awareness

Moments to Watch For

- A player who identifies their own trigger before it escalates.
- A player who asks to come off rather than losing control.
- A player who names a strength of theirs accurately, without inflating or dismissing it.

Across the bands. Sprouts notice how their body feels. Climbers name their trigger. Summit name their pattern under pressure, including the unflattering part.

In this family. Contact and officiating are the two reliable triggers here. A child who can name theirs has taken the first real step.

Y8 — Honesty

Moments to Watch For

- A player who gives an accurate self-rating rather than a flattering one.
- A player who admits they stopped working rather than blaming tiredness.
- A player who acknowledges a weakness without being prompted.

Across the bands. Sprouts tell one honest thing about their day. Climbers rate their effort honestly. Summit reject an available and true excuse.

In this family. Team sports make it easy to hide inside the group. Honest self-assessment is the antidote and it has to be asked for individually, never in front of the team.

Y9 — Balance

Moments to Watch For

- A player fully absorbed in the game without needing prompting.

- A player who keeps playing when given the option to stop.
- A player present through the whole session without reaching for a phone.

Across the bands. Sprouts play hard with real people. Climbers trade screen time for movement. Summit manage their own device use around training and sleep.

In this family. Invasion sports are where free play used to happen on its own. Say that to Summit: this is the thing that used to fill every afternoon, and it still can.

Coach Notes for Invasion Sports

What This Family Teaches Best

Value	Why This Family Teaches It Well
L6 Communication	Information that arrives late is not information. Shared space and continuous play make talking functionally necessary rather than merely nice.
L7 Service	Screens, decoy runs, covering, and pressing are work that only helps somebody else and appears in no statistic. The invisible job is the whole sport.
L3 Teamwork	A child can have a good session while their team has a bad one. That gap is the lesson, and it is visible every possession.
A5 Emotional Control	Constant contact with no natural pause. This is the hardest version of the lesson in the curriculum and therefore the most valuable place to teach it.

What This Family Teaches Poorly

- L8 Integrity is harder to see here because an official makes the call, not the child. Name it loudly on the rare occasions a child self-reports, and treat simulation as the counter-example, corrected privately.
- P2 Trying Again has no natural pause to occupy. The reset happens during live play, which makes it harder to see and harder for the child to execute. Be patient with it.
- Y2 Confidence has fewer countable repetitions than a net sport offers. Use situations rather than numbers as the evidence a child collects about themselves.

Delivery Errors Specific to This Family

- Watching the ball. The coach who follows the ball sees only the child who has it, and misses every off-ball moment in the lesson. Deliberately watch away from the ball for whole possessions.
- Naming only the scorers. Goals and baskets name themselves. The defensive recovery, the decoy run, and the extra pass do not, and those are the moments this curriculum is about.
- Coaching through the game. Invasion sports tempt a coach to direct play continuously from the sideline. Coach at the break, not through the game. Constant instruction removes exactly the decision-making the session is meant to build.
- Letting the group argue with officials. One player disputing a call becomes five within seconds inside a shared space. Address the first instance immediately or accept the pattern.
- Treating retaliation as equivalent to the original foul. It is not, and children know it is not. Name the composure, address the retaliation, and do it separately.

Safety Notes

Heat is the leading risk. For summer outdoor delivery, heat is the most likely severe-outcome hazard, ahead of collision or head injury. Foundation programs measure wet bulb globe temperature with an actual device thirty minutes before activity and every thirty minutes during, and follow the thresholds in Document 8. Cold water immersion capability is not optional at the higher thresholds.

Goal anchoring. Every movable goal is anchored with a minimum of two anchors, every session, checked before children are on the field. Goals are never left standing unattended. This is a pre-session check with a signature, not a habit.

Concussion. Return-to-play statutes exist in all fifty states but in most cases govern school athletics rather than recreational programs. The Foundation adopts the protocol regardless: written policy acknowledged by every parent at registration, removal from play on suspicion, no same-day return under any circumstances, and written medical clearance before return.

Field sweep. Open green space in a residential community is not a purpose-built field. A debris sweep before every session is a coach responsibility and appears in no governing body rulebook.

Talking to Parents About Invasion Sports

Parents in team sports ask about playing time and position more than anything else. At the ages where USA Basketball mandates equal playing time, say so plainly and cite the rule rather than defending a personal decision. Where the rule leaves it to the coach, the Foundation's standard is that development beats results at every age in this program, and that a child who plays is a child who learns.

For flag football specifically, parents will have heard that it is the safe alternative to tackle. The honest answer is that head impact exposure is dramatically lower, which is the reason the sport is in the portfolio, and that flag is non-contact by rule rather than in practice, which is why mouthguards are mandatory and body control is coached.

Play Academy Foundation, Inc. is a national nonprofit that brings professional sports, wellness, and recreation programming directly into the neighborhoods where children live.

Roughly half of American high school students attend no physical education in a given week, and fewer than three in ten attend daily, against a national recommendation of daily physical education. That deficit has held for thirty years. The Foundation exists because it is not going to close on its own.