

Now that the Board has completed a very active winter and registration is upon us, we would like to let all of our RFL families in on what is new for 2009. Attached is the presentation that was given to your coaches last week documenting the changes that have been made. Once you have read the attachment the rest of this email will make a lot more sense. Please take a look at the attachment first. I am going to go topic by topic so this is going to be long. Please take the time to read it, especially the Q&A at the end as it will answer most of your questions.

1. **Weight Changes** – It is important when looking at youth football weight requirements to always be aware of the average weights not just the high ends. Last year's average weights for each division are now posted on the web site weight charts. In response to the Satisfaction Survey we conducted last December and numerous emails and conversations with parents and coaches the weights for all but Flag and Ankle Biter have been increased by 5 pounds this year. The one exception is the 11 year old Pee Wee Weight which was bumped 10 pounds in an attempt to help close the gap between Pee Wee and Intermediate.
2. **Age Changes** – There are several issues here. All of the medical research available points to age rather than weight being the major cause of injury in specified age groups. In simple terms older, more developed, experienced athletes are more likely to not only have a huge playing advantage but also contribute more to injuries to younger players rather than heavier players in any given age grouping. We also have an agreement with the City of Rockville that requires us to strive for two year age spreads in any division but not to exceed three. In addressing both issues the BOD has restricted 9 year old participation in the Ankle Biter Division to those without prior tackle experience. 12 year olds are no longer eligible for the Pee Wee Division and 14 year olds must play in the Middle School Division.
3. **Ankle Biter Game Changes** – The Ankle Biter Division was established six years ago as a non-competitive, strictly instructional league. The mission is to teach sportsmanship, a basic understanding of the game of football and proper fundamental technique so as to prepare all players for the subsequent levels. It has become obvious that the Ankle Biter Division based on the behavior of some coaches, some parents and some players is no longer consistent with the original premise. Current and future Ankle Biter parents should read the attachment which provides a full explanation of the changes.
4. **Two Tiered System** – In an effort to provide a more meaningful experience for all RFL players, not just the athletically gifted, starting this fall players will have the opportunity to play in the Navy Division or Army Division based on size, experience and ability. While this is a work in progress and we will experience some speed bumps along the way, the Board believes that this will allow more playing time and a more positive result for players at all levels. A full description of the system and the implementation is included in the attachment to this email.

The Board has also done due diligence and looked at what the other leagues in our area are doing and the advantage we believe RFL families enjoy. The RFL is not for everybody but we do believe we have the best mix of spirited, competitive football while constantly remembering that this is about the “kids” and it is youth football, not the NFL. Here are some of our findings:

1. All RFL games will be played at our brand new facility in King Farm or our play-offs and Super Bowl at Bullis. The new facility will have state of the art lights, full raised bleachers, permanent snack bar, bathrooms, scoreboards (both fields), stadium press box and sound system with video deck, and the best news of all, 240 parking places on site with 200 more being negotiated for 20 yards from the field. The fields are side by side which means no running from one end of the park to another for families with kids playing at the same time in different divisions. The new snack bar and bathrooms are also much closer to the fields. Two full size fields will also allow us to complete the season prior to Thanksgiving.

The Capital Beltway League (CBL) with teams in Montgomery Village, Germantown and Bethesda play in a 16 club organization requiring travel throughout Prince Georges County, NE and SE Washington DC as well as one group in Southern Maryland. It is not unusual for families with more than one player to have children playing in totally different locations. Most CBL fields are not lighted, have no permanent bathroom or snack bar facilities and limited bleachers and seating area.

The Mid-Maryland Youth Football League operates in Howard and Carroll County. This is a very well run youth league with many of the advantages of the RFL other than the considerable travel factor.

2. All RFL Coaches are required to be certified by the National Youth Sports Coaches Association (NYSCA), submit finger prints for FBI background checks, complete the Football USA Level 1 and 2 Football Coach Certification Course and pass the certification exam and attend at least one approved youth football clinic per year. Depending on the division the RFL requires varying levels of playing and coaching experience to serve as a head coach. Beginning this year the RFL has also appointed a Director of Coach Education and Development to assist coaches with practice planning, drills, playbook development and game day activities. The Director will also be recruiting new coaches.

All leagues have different requirements for coaches. Make sure you inquire as to what qualifies a person to coach in the league or organization you are considering.

3. Ages and Weights are the single most difficult thing for all youth football leagues to deal with. It is very important to closely examine the age and weight structure of any league you are considering. Make sure you are comparing the proverbial “apples to apples”. The CBL Ankle Biter League, for instance, is a far cry from the RFL Ankle Biters. The CBL AB is dominated by 10 year olds weighing as much as 77 pounds. This is a highly competitive division with emphasis on

reaching the championship. There is no minimum play rule so participation in games is not guaranteed. The CBL Pony Division allows 11 year olds up to 85 pounds. While these “older but lighter” weights work for some players make sure you are looking at the actual weights and ages and not the Division names. Average weights, as stated before is a significant factor.

4. Minimum play and practice restrictions are the single most critical difference between the RFL and other leagues. The RFL guarantees that your child will play in every single game for at least eight plays. With our new Navy and Army Divisions we are providing even more playing time and participation during meaningful plays. Our Ankle Biters will now play a minimum of one half of every game. The CBL has no minimum play requirement and players that practice all week may not get much playing time in games.

The RFL allows four practices per week prior to school starting, then three (Ankle Biters two) once school begins. Other leagues do not limit practice during August and allow five practices per week once the season starts. The RFL is probably too tolerant of missing players in August however we are aware that vacation plans are what they are and while there may be some extra “work” for missed practice it is not overly demanding. Make sure you check other leagues policies on missed practice, especially August practice.

5. The RFL Core Team registration is significantly cheaper than other leagues. RFL players also get to keep their jerseys and this year will receive a Video Yearbook of highlights and other good stuff if all works as planned. RFL families are also not asked to do any fundraising to offset league expenses.

Q&A

Have the changes affected the way I will register my player for 2009?

No. Registration will be the same as it has been for several years now. You will still register for the line of teams you played for last year if you are a Returning Player or will register for the appropriate division if you are a New Player and request a coach or team assignment as always. The only registration change for 2009 is Returning Players will only have until June 1st to guarantee their roster spot on the line of teams they played on last year.

How do I know if my child is a Navy or Army player?

Your child will report to practice as always. For the first couple of weeks the coaches will be evaluating and determining who should play on which team. Coaches should have a Parent Meeting or send an email explaining team procedures and the process they will go through to assign players. As a parent you should speak with your child’s coach if you have any questions as to what his placement will be. The final decision is the coach’s, but parental input is very important.

Is there any differences in the way games are played or play-offs?

No. The rules are the same for all teams regardless of whether they are Navy or Army. All teams will play eight regular season games and then play-offs. The Navy and Army Super Bowls will be played on the same day at the same venue.

Will all teams have a Navy and Army team? What if my son's team does not have an Army team and he should be an Army player?

While we hope all teams have both a Navy and an Army team that probably will not happen this year. If there is not an Army team your son will be given the opportunity to join another team with an Army group so he can experience the advantages of the Army Division for less experienced players. In some case we will merge a number of players from two teams to form an Army squad. This will be for one season only and your son will return to his home team the following year.

Who will the Army coaches be and will practices be separate?

Both the Navy and Army squads will be treated as one team during the week. Navy coaches will mentor the Army coaches when necessary. The teams will practice together for the most part and run the same offensive and defensive schemes. There may be times when the teams are separated at practice to work on specific things they will be doing in their game that weekend.

Will my player get to participate more than before?

YES! The purpose of this change is to provide a much more meaningful experience for all players at all levels. By reducing roster sizes to a maximum of 22 this will be accomplished immediately as more playing time results from fewer players. In fact we believe the average roster size will be 18 or 19 players. The Navy Division will still have an 8 play minimum play rule as always. The Army Division, because it is more developmental, will have a 10 play minimum play rule which will guarantee that those players who used to get "snuck" into games or put in the game when it no longer mattered will now play a significant part in the teams success.

My son was an 8 year old Ankle Biter last year who was planning to play AB again this season. He is now being forced up to the Pony division with all of those big kids that I saw in the Pony division last year. Should I be worried ?

No. First of all, those big Ponies from last year will be moving up to Pee Wee this year. Your son will be playing against the same group of kids that were in the AB division last year. The kids all age and move up together. Second and more importantly, the creation of the Pony "Army" Division will end up being like a 9 year old Ankle Biter division. Most experienced 10 year olds will be playing in the Pony "Navy" Division which will leave the smaller less experienced kids in the "Army" Division.

My son was a Pee Wee last year and I was hoping he could play another year as an Older but Lighter in the Pee Wee Division. He is now being forced up to the Intermediate Division with those huge 8th graders. Should I be worried ?

No. First of all, those big 8th graders will be in High School in 2009. Your son will be playing against 7th and 8th graders. These are the same players that he has been playing against for years. Second and more importantly, the Intermediate "Army" division will be made up of mostly smaller, less experienced 7th graders. The larger, more experienced Intermediates will populate the "Navy" Division. This allows smaller 12 year olds to play against other players of similar

weight and maturity without having them go down to the Pee Wee Division and play against 10 and 11 years olds, which is not fair to those younger players.

While we have tried to cover as much as possible I am sure all of your questions may not have been answered. Please feel free to reply with any questions you may have. More will be coming but remember Returning Player Registration starts on May 15 and New Player on June 1. Please review the "Registration Primer" which begins on the home page at www.rfl.cc before you register.

Thanks and I look forward to seeing you at our new home in the Fall.

Eric Heckman
President, RFL