USA FOOTBALL INTRODUCES ROOKIE TACKLE PILOT PROGRAM

USA Football announces 11 youth football leagues spanning nine states to pilot
Rookie Tackle – a bridge game between flag football and 11-player tackle

Rookie Tackle, a bridge game between flag football and 11-player tackle, is designed to introduce young athletes to tackle football. In alignment with the U.S. Olympic Committee’s American Development Model (ADM), USA Football will pilot Rookie Tackle this fall as part of a long-term athlete development pathway in the sport.

A fun, skill-development-centric version of the game for young athletes, Rookie Tackle will be evaluated throughout an 11-league pilot season. This version of football delivers a progression practiced in a variety of sports, including tee-ball to “coach pitch” to “player pitch” in baseball.

A key outcome of the pilot is to learn how players, parents, coaches and youth league commissioners embrace its concept and how it may be improved for a wider spectrum of youth sports programs in future seasons. Youth players’ physical activity also will be measured to gauge fitness benefits specific to the small-sided game. Similar versions of the sport have been played in some youth leagues for years. USA Football continues its commitment to innovative new standards by introducing the USOC’s ADM to football through Rookie Tackle, joining a family of initiatives including Heads Up Football, which advances coaching education and safer play in high schools and youth leagues nationwide.

“This is an exciting step in our sport’s evolution for the good of young athletes,” said USA Football CEO SCOTT HALLENBECK. “The 11 youth programs participating in this pilot season will help us evaluate Rookie Tackle and the benefits of a player pathway for athletes, coaches and parents.”

“It’s a game that teaches so much, it’s a great education, it’s a stepping stone, it’s a transition to 11-player football and I can’t think of a better game that does it,” said USA Football Master Trainer and National High School Hall of Fame football coach CHUCK KYLE. Kyle, the head football coach at Cleveland St. Ignatius High School, also serves as the Cleveland Browns’ youth football advisor. Kyle has helped the Browns become the first NFL team to assist USA Football in establishing a Rookie Tackle pilot league.

“The American Development Model stresses long term athlete development principles to encourage our kids to develop a wide range of athletic skills to strengthen their foundation for success and enjoyment in sport,” said United States Olympic Committee Chief of Sport Performance ALAN ASHLEY. “I commend USA Football’s leadership for moving towards the American Development Model for the betterment of the sport’s future.”

Key Aspects of Rookie Tackle Game Play

- Six, seven or eight players on the field per team
- 40-yard-by-35-yard playing field size, scaled for a youth athlete's age and skill level
- Maximizes field space by playing two games simultaneously on a regulation-sized field
- Players learn multiple positions and skills; position-specialization is not introduced
- Smaller teams foster more playing time and opportunities for improvement, success
- Players on offensive and defensive lines begin every play in a two-point stance
- Removal of special teams encourages more plays from scrimmage and skill development
- More focused, individualized coaching attention by virtue of a smaller roster
- A video about Rookie Tackle and its game play can be found here

* Rookie Tackle variations will be evaluated during the 2017 pilot

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About USA Football: USA Football designs and delivers premier educational, developmental and competitive programs to advance and grow the sport. As the sport's national governing body, member of the U.S. Olympic Committee and organizer of the U.S. National Team for international competition, USA Football partners with leaders in medicine, child advocacy and athletics to support positive football experiences for youth, high school and other amateur players.
**Rookie Tackle Pilot Locations and Organizations**

Austin, Texas: Hill Country Pop Warner  
Cleveland, Ohio: Cleveland Rookie Tackle  
Frisco, Texas: Frisco Football League  
Indianapolis, Ind.: Indy Youth Sports  
Lakewood, Colo.: JeffCo Midget Football Association  
Lexington, Ky.: Central Kentucky Youth Football League  
Oregon City, Ore.: Tualatin Valley Youth Football League  
Smyrna, Ga.: Georgia Girls Tackle Football  
Westfield, Ind.: Westfield Youth Football League  
Yaphank, N.Y.: Suffolk County PAL Football League

**Support for USA Football’s Rookie Tackle Pilot Program**

“The proper development of young players is important to ensure the sport’s long-term viability, and Rookie Tackle is the right step to ensure football’s enjoyment is continued for generations to come.”

Bill Polian, Pro Football Hall of Fame Contributor,  
Chairman of USA Football’s Football Advisory Committee and NFL Analyst for ESPN

“As we continue to learn more, this is a sensible step for the development of young athletes. By targeting their physical and mental development, we can help maximize their potential and keep them active supporting success on and off the field.”

Dr. Stanley Herring, USA Football Medical Advisory Committee Chairman

“Educating coaches and parents is more important than ever, and USA Football’s proposed player pathway is another advancement in football education. As long-time football parents, we’re excited to see USA Football pilot Rookie Tackle.”

Chris and Mike Golic, Football Parents and Co-Host of ESPN's “Mike & Mike”

“Our No. 1 priority is to make sure our students learn and grow, and while this must happen through the classroom, our young people can also develop character through athletics. We are glad to partner with USA Football to provide our students with a safer, fun and healthy experience with the sport.”

Dr. William R. Hite, Superintendent of The School District of Philadelphia

“The game of football has evolved tremendously over the last several years. We must continue to find ways to grow and evolve the game, and I believe Rookie Tackle does that. Rookie Tackle is a common-sense approach to introduce tackle football to kids. We applaud USA Football for taking this very valuable step towards improving the game at the youth level. Pop Warner is proud to have one of our leagues participate in this pilot season.”

Jon Butler, Executive Director, Pop Warner

“We are always seeking new ways to strengthen our support of youth and high school football in our state, and the Rookie Tackle program provides a unique opportunity by creating an atmosphere that is structured to benefit early skill development, and most importantly, allows kids to learn and love football. The Browns are proud to partner with USA Football for this innovative program and to help host a pilot league in Northeast Ohio this fall.”

Jenner Tekancic, Vice President of Community Relations, Cleveland Browns

“We commend USA Football and the 11 youth leagues that are participating in this pilot program. The NFL shares a commitment to youth football development and is proud to support USA Football and the Rookie Tackle program. From smaller fields to an enhanced player experience – Rookie Tackle is a critical step forward in a concerted effort to better teach the fundamentals and create additional pathways for youth participants to play the game.”

Roman Oben, Senior Director, Youth and High School Football, National Football League

“Rookie Tackle has the potential to enhance the social and physical benefits football provides young athletes today. As a coach, I see not only a pathway for the development of youth players, but also a pathway for youth football coaches.”

Tony Dungy, Pro Football Hall of Fame Coach, Former NFL Player and NFL Analyst for NBC Sports

“Partnering with USA Football to implement the Rookie Tackle program is a decision our league believes will enhance the youth football experience for our players and their families. After experiencing the game at its highest level, it is essential that our sport adopts a ‘right age, right stage’ philosophy for the best interests of our kids.”

Chad Pennington, Rookie Tackle Pilot League Commissioner and Former NFL Quarterback