

P.E. SPORTS AND ACTIVITIES

FOOTBALL



“Individual commitment to a group effort -- that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.”

Vince Lombardi, American football player, coach, and executive in the National Football League

INTRODUCTION

Football is a physically challenging, aggressive sport played by two teams of opposing players. Each of the two teams tries to get the ball across the opposing team’s goal by running, kicking and passing the ball.

American-style football is often known as “the gridiron sport” because of the design of the field. The sport is widely popular in the United States and is gaining fan support in Canada. Although American-style tackle football, as it is called, has spread to a few other countries, it has not achieved the international reputation of such sports as baseball and basketball.

American-style football is a combination of two older sports, soccer and rugby. Soccer (still called football in England) and rugby, which developed from soccer, are both more popular in Europe and other countries than in the United States.

Unlike soccer, a game in which players are forbidden to use their hands but may use other body parts, football allows perhaps the roughest physical contact of any team sport. However, two variations on tackle football, called “touch football” and “flag football” do not involve tackling the opponent and are less physically challenging to play.



HISTORY OF FOOTBALL

Football first became popular in the United States in the 1820s when it was widely played in colleges and universities. Many colleges, including Yale, Harvard and Cornell, played an early version of football which incorporated many features of rugby. Football at this time had no uniform rules and regulations and games often ended up with heaps of injured players on the field! To stop this physically violent aspect of football, Walter Camp (now remembered as “the father of American football”) in 1880 made many changes in the game. Most of these changes regulated the physical violence of the sport and many have lasted into modern times.



Camp refined the scrimmage (a term borrowed from rugby), a play whereby the center puts the ball into play by sending it to the quarterback. In addition, Camp introduced the role of the quarterback, now considered the most exciting position on the team. Camp also altered the number of players on a team from the traditional 15 of rugby to the 11 now used in modern football. Camp was also the person who finalized the alignment of the 11 players into 7 forwards, a quarterback, two halfbacks and a fullback.

Between 1882 and 1888, Camp made three more significant changes in the game. First, a system of downs and yardage to be gained was finalized. According to the new rules, a team has to surrender the ball if it fails to gain five yards (later increased to 10 yards) in three downs (later raised to four). This was the rule that made it necessary to mark the field with horizontal lines five yards apart, thus giving the field its traditional “gridiron” appearance.



Another rule Camp introduced was regulations for scoring—specifically, giving points to different scoring methods. For example, tackling a ball carrier behind his own goal line was worth one point. Many of Camp’s changes in this area still apply today.

Finally, Camp changed the tackling rule to its present status. In early football, tackling was permitted only from the waist up. Camp changed the rule to permit tackling as low as the knee area. Linemen, however, were required to keep their arms at their sides, and were not allowed to block with their arms as they previously had done.

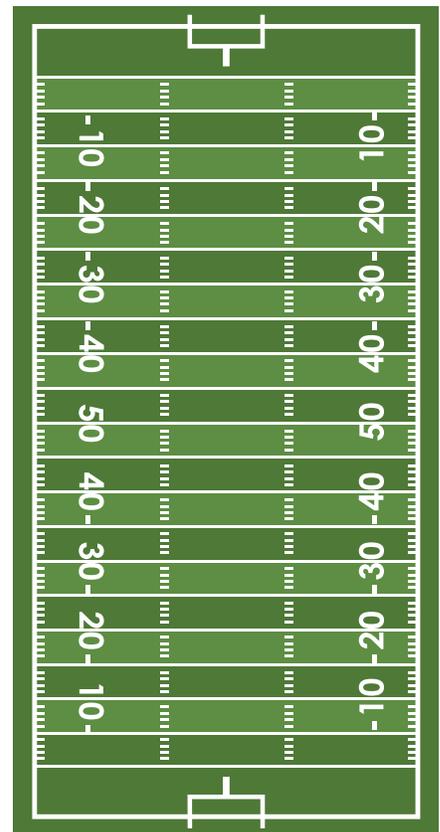
Football has grown steadily in popularity in the United States and Canada, largely because of television. Thanks to television coverage of this sport, football has grown into a major industry in North America. Television, in fact, dictates much about how the game is now played. For example, halftime, time outs and even the overall length of the game have been extended to allow for TV commercials. As a result, games on television can last up to three hours.

Television has also made superstars out of many players, giving them a chance for new careers in the media. Many football players have “retired” from the game, only to reappear on television as actors and sports commentators.

HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

The football field is traditionally 100 yards long from one goal line to the other and 160 feet wide. The “end zone” extends ten yards past each goal line. In professional football, the goalposts are ten yards behind the goal lines. The width between the posts is 18 feet six inches.

A coin toss determines which team has the choice of receiving the ball or starting the game with a kick-off. A kick-off occurs when the football is kicked while it is placed on a tee and sent to the opposing team. The kick-off traditionally occurs on the kicking team’s 35-yard line. The receiving team is situated 10 yards from the kickoff line. Members of the kicking team must give the receiving team’s returner the opportunity for a fair catch. If he signals for a fair catch, the players can’t touch him and can’t come within 3 feet of him until he touches the ball.



Once the ball has been kicked off, the team with the ball tries to advance down the field in order to score points. When a player carries the ball into the end zone or catches a forward pass in the end zone, he/she scores six points for a touchdown.

Meanwhile, the defensive team tries to get into a scoring position either by intercepting a pass or by picking up a fumbled ball. The team that scores a touchdown can get an extra point by kicking the ball over the crossbar of the goalposts in a move known as a “conversion.” By running instead of kicking the conversion, two additional points can be earned.

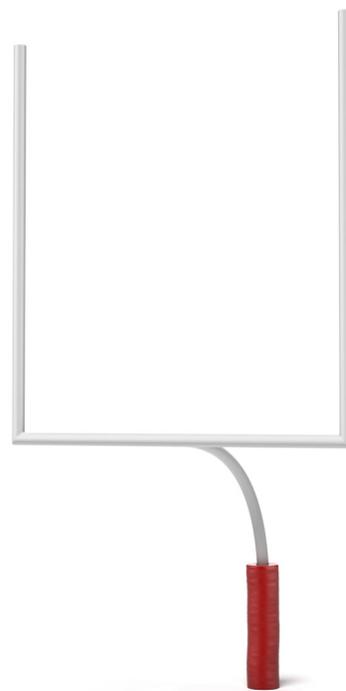
In order to make a first down, the offensive team has four downs, or plays, in which to advance the ball at least ten yards. Each time that a player makes a first down, that team gets another series of four downs in which it can gain at least ten more yards.

If a team has failed to gain 10 yards by the fourth down it has two options to choose from. The team may opt to punt the ball to the other team, or it may attempt a field goal or even try to run or pass the ball again to get a first down. A “punt” entails dropping the ball and kicking it before it touches the ground.

A professional or college football game lasts for sixty minutes broken into four 15-minute periods or “quarters.” After the second quarter, there is usually a 20-minute break.

The clock may be stopped for any of the following four reasons:

- an incomplete pass
- a runner goes out of bounds
- a penalty
- after a score is made



Teams are typically penalized five, ten or fifteen yards, depending on the type of foul committed. For example, a five-yard penalty would be given for delaying the game or for crossing the line of scrimmage before the ball is passed. Ten-yard penalties are typically given for illegally holding a player on the opposing team.

Fifteen-yard penalties are given for the most serious offenses. Some examples are: blocking from behind, butting another player with a helmet and running into/tackling the passer once the ball has been thrown and intentionally grabbing a face mask of an opponent and using it to pull the player down or twist his head. A major face mask violation also results in an automatic first down.

EQUIPMENT AND CLOTHING

Because of the rough nature of football, modern players wear a good deal of padding and protection, including helmets, face masks and pads that cover the hips, shoulders, knees and forearms. Flak jackets also are used to cover the ribs and mouthpieces protect the mouth and face. Now that artificial turf is so widely used on playing fields, special cleated shoes are also worn. Football equipment and clothing can be considered heavy, adding pounds to the player.



Players wear a uniform characterized by tight pants ending just below the knee. Numbers are sewn on the fronts and backs of the jerseys for identification purposes. Quarterbacks and kickers are 1-19, running backs and defensive backs, 20-49, centers and linebackers, 50-59 and linemen, 60-79. Wide receivers and tight ends are numbers 80-89 and defensive linemen/linebackers use numbers 90-99.



FOOTBALL NOTES

American football is the most popular sport in America; even replacing baseball as the “national pastime.” Football is also the ninth most popular sport in the world, with the biggest competition being organized by the National Football League (NFL). Football is most popular in southern areas of America, like Texas and Florida. Recent polls showed that around 35% of U.S. adults who follow at least one sport say pro football is their favorite.

NFL: A recent rule change has instituted a 15-yard penalty if a player lowers his head and initiates contact with his helmet, which also could lead to ejection. This is similar to college football’s “targeting” rule. Moreover, if this is enforced to the fullest possible extent, it would result in nearly every single player in the league needing to change the way he tackles.

In America we are not just watching football in our homes, but fans are coming by the thousands to watch games in stadiums. Recently the league had an average attendance of 67,604 fans at each game. That is more than any other sport league in the world.

With the attraction of money and fame, football has become an American institution. Football players are among the highest paid professional athletes in the world. For example, a top quarterback recently earned a salary of \$18,000,000.

Some recent NFL rule changes include: a fumble is now reviewable no matter where it happens on the field, the clipping rule has been expanded to include rolling up the side of a defender’s legs, all scoring plays are reviewable by the replay official and referee and the height of goal posts increased by five feet.

At the amateur level, football is competitively played at several levels. High School football programs are offered in most school districts and are overseen by state athletic associations. These organizations, in most states, sponsor playoffs and award a state championship title at various levels. At the college and university level the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) sponsors teams and championship tournaments for nearly 1,300 member schools. The National

Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), is the governing body of small collegiate athletic programs, with about 250 member schools. The most coveted award for college football is the Heisman Trophy.

There are, however, many opportunities to play organized football. Most cities and towns offer amateur clubs or teams. Some are sponsored by such organizations as YMCA's or local park districts.

A growing area of concern for those playing football is head trauma resulting in concussions. Several studies have noted an increase in high school concussions in recent years, although it is not clear whether the rise is due to more injuries or improved diagnosis. Numerous professional football players have developed severe symptoms, as a result of repeated head trauma. California has adopted a law recently that requires coaches to remove any student-player who is suspected of having a head injury from athletic activity for the rest of the day. The law also requires approval from a medical professional before students who suffer head injuries may return to the field.

To find out more about this sport visit these football websites:

www.nfl.com

www.ncaa.com