

Game Rules

FOOTBALL

PLAYING FIELD AND EQUIPMENT

The field measures 53 1/3 yards wide and 120 yards long.

End lines are boundaries at each end of the field. *Side lines* are boundaries on each side of the field. *Goal lines* are 100 yards apart, 10 yards from the end lines. *End zones* are 10 yards deep, bounded by end, side and goal lines. End and side lines are out of bounds; goal lines are inside the end zone.

Goal posts are metal structures on each end line. A horizontal crossbar is 10 feet above the ground. The vertical uprights are 18'6" apart with 30' height minimum. Flags secured on flexible poles stand in each of the corners of the end zones. A scoreboard monitors scoring and playing time.

Football Playing Field



Field Markings include:

- White border marks the field, this border and anything outside of it is considered out of bounds
- Markings every 5 yards across the width between the sidelines
- Markings every 1 yard along the side lines
- Numbers every 10 yards by the side lines
- Hash marks* which consist of 2 rows of broken inbound lines parallel to side lines and marking the yards between goal lines)
- Side zone line markings which are between the inbound lines and side lines
- Point-after-touchdown line* (2 or 3 yards from the goal line)

The *football* is an inflated oval made of natural tan pebble grain leather or composite materials. It is approx. 11" long and weighs 14 oz.

A 10-yard *yardage chain* hangs between two 5'H sticks.

The *down marker* is a 4'H pole with 4 flip-over signs numbered 1 through 4. It marks the leading point of the ball at the start of play and the number of the down.

GENERAL RULES

Each team has 11 players on the playing field with all substitutes in a "team area" along the side lines between the 25-yard lines.

The *offensive* team has legal control of the ball. Five of the players are interior linemen (1 center, 2 guards, and 2 tackles); 2 of the players are ends (split or tight); 1 player is quarterback; and 3 players are backs (running backs or wide receivers).

The *defense* consists of 3 or 4 *down linemen* (ends, tackles, guards); 3 or 4 *linebackers* (left, middle, right, or inside/outside combinations) and the *defensive* backs (cornerbacks and safeties).

Special teams are units that are on the field during kickoffs, free kicks, punts, field goal, and extra point attempts. Most special teams players are second- and third-string players from other positions. They are unique in that they can serve as offensive or defensive units and are only seen sporadically throughout a game.

The offensive team must have at least 7 players on or within the lines of scrimmage (2 imaginary lines – offensive and defensive – running from the side lines through each end of the football) and 4 players at 1 yard behind the line.

The neutral zone is the space that is the length of the football between the two scrimmage lines. Only the center player can have any body part within this area but cannot go beyond it.

Defensive players can line up anywhere behind their scrimmage line. Any player can run with the ball; only the two ends and the backs are eligible receivers, permitted to catch a *pass* (ball thrown by one player to another).

GAME LENGTH

Football is a timed sport. The team with the most points at the end of the time period wins the game.

A standard football game is divided into 4 periods or quarters (12-minute quarters in high-school football and often shorter at lower levels), with a long "half time" between the second and third quarter. Clock stops after certain plays; therefore, a game can last longer (often more than three hours in real time). A tied game continues into a 15-minute overtime period. The team scoring first wins. Playoff games cannot end in a tie, so 15-minute periods continue until there is a winner.

Each team is allowed three 90-second timeouts per half without penalty. Automatic timeouts may also occur, for example, for an injury, when ball goes out of bounds, after any score or field goal attempt, etc.

The second clock counts the time between plays. A period does not end until play has been completed. If the defending team commits a foul in the last play and a half, the offense may run another play.

The clock starts when ball is kicked off, except in the last 2 minutes of the game, in which case the clock doesn't begin until ball is touched by a receiver or a player on the kicking team if the ball has traveled 10 yards.

SCORING

Field goal (3 points)

A field goal is scored when the ball is place kicked, drop kicked, or free kicked after a fair catch between the goal posts behind the opponent's end zone. The most common type of kick used is the place kick. For a place kick, the ball must first be snapped to a placeholder, who holds the ball upright on the ground with his fingertip so that it may be kicked. If a field goal is missed, the ball is returned to the original line of scrimmage, to the spot of the kick, to the 20-yard line if the ball enters the end zone, or to the 20-yard line if that is further from the goal line, and possession is given to the other team.

Touchdown (6 points)

A touchdown is achieved when a player has legal possession of the ball and the ball crosses an imaginary vertical plane above the opposing team's goal line. After a touchdown, the scoring team attempts a try for 1 or 2 points (see below). A successful touchdown is signaled by an official extending both arms vertically above the head.

The player who advances the ball into or catches it in the end zone is credited with the touchdown. If a forward pass was thrown on the play, the passer is also credited with a passing touchdown.

Try for extra point (1 or 2 points)

A try is more frequently called an extra-point attempt or a PAT (Point After Touchdown). Either one or two additional points may be scored during the try. Ball is spotted at the 2 yard line (NFL) or 3 yard line (college/high school), and the team is given one un-timed play to earn points:

The offensive team may attempt to kick the ball through the goalposts, in the same manner that a field goal is kicked. If successful the team is awarded one point, referred to as an extra point.

The offensive team may attempt to advance the ball via run or pass into the end zone, much like a touchdown on the extra-point attempt, except that it receives two points. This is called a two-point conversion.

Procedure

Team captains meet midfield for a coin toss. Winner may choose to kick off or receive or pick the goal to first defend. At the start of the second half, the loser of the coin toss gets the choice. Teams change goals after first and third periods.

Ball is put into play by a free kick to begin the game, the second half or after a score. It is in a fixed spot (on a tee) between the inbound lines of the team's own 35-yard line (40-yard line for high school play).

All players on the kicking team must be behind the ball and all opposition players must be at least 10 yards away.

The offense tries to advance the football on plays. The defense tries to prevent the offense from scoring or advancing the football. The down system: The offense must advance the ball at least 10 yards every

four plays or downs. Each time the offense is successful in advancing the ball 10 yards, they get four more downs or what is called a “first down”. If the offense does not get 10 yards in four plays, the other team gains possession of the football at the current line of scrimmage. In order to keep the other team from getting good field position the offense can punt (kick) the ball to the other team intentionally. This is often done on 4th down, when the offense is outside of field goal range. Offensive plays on downs start with a snap. This is when the center passes the football between their legs to one of the offensive backs (usually the quarterback). Ball is advanced either by running with the football (called rushing) or passing the football. Football play is over when 1) the player with the football is tackled or goes out of bounds 2) an incomplete pass 3) there is a score.

The offensive team can lose possession of the football by:

- Scoring
- Not getting 10 yards in 4 downs
- Fumbling or dropping the football and the defensive team recovers it
- Throwing the football to a defensive player for an interception
- Punting, or kicking, the football to the defensive team
- Missing a field goal
- Getting tackled in the end zone for a safety

PENALTIES

There are many rules and penalties that are enforced during a football game. Most result in a loss or gain of yardage depending on whether the penalty is against the offense or the defense. The severity of the penalty determines the number of yards. Most penalties are 5 or 10 yards, but some personal foul penalties result in 15 yards. Also, pass interference can result in a penalty that matches the length of the intended pass. The team that did not commit the penalty has the right to decline the penalty. Below are some of the more common football penalties:

False Start: When a football player on the offense moves just prior to the snap. This is a 5-yard penalty. Note that one back on the offense can legally be “in motion” at the time of the snap.

Offside: If a player from the offense or defense is on the wrong side of the line of scrimmage at the time of the snap. A defensive player can cross the line of scrimmage as long as they get back before the snap, but if they touch an offensive player they can be called for encroachment.

Holding: When a player grabs a football player without the ball with the hands or hooks him or tackles him.

Pass Interference: When a defender contacts a pass receiver after the ball is in the air to prevent him from catching the ball. This is up to the referee to determine. If the contact is before the ball is in the air it will be called defensive holding. Note that pass interference can also be called on the offense if the defender has position and is trying to catch the ball.

Facemask: To protect the football players, it is illegal to grab another player’s facemask.

Roughing the passer or kicker: To protect kickers and quarterbacks, who are very vulnerable when they are passing or kicking the ball, players are not allowed to run into them after the ball has been thrown or kicked.

Intentional Grounding: When the passer throws a pass nowhere near an eligible receiver strictly to avoid being sacked.

Ineligible Receiver Downfield: When one of the offensive players that is not an eligible receiver is more than 5 yards downfield from the line of scrimmage during a forward pass.

Other Versions of Play

Football can be played under other sets of rules, including the following:

6-Man Football – Teams consist of 3 linemen and 3 backs. Field is reduced to 120 x 240 feet. Ball can only be passed or kicked; running plays not permitted.

8-Man Football – Teams consist of 5 linemen and 3 backs. A regulation field is used.

Touch Football – There is no limit to the number of players. Field can be any size. Tackling is not permitted; play is over when ballcarrier is touched by one or two hands of an opponent.



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