

Football Basics

Check here if you're new to football, having a difficult time following the games or if you just need to look up some terms.

The Basics of the Game

One 11-man team has possession of the football. It is called the offense and it tries to advance the ball down the field-by running with the ball or throwing it - and score points by crossing the goal line and getting into an area called the end zone. The other team (also with 11 players) is called the defense. It tries to stop the offensive team and make it give up possession of the ball. If the team with the ball does score or is forced to give up possession, the offensive and defensive teams switch roles (the offensive team goes on defense and the defensive team goes on offense). And so on, back and forth, until all four quarters of the game have been played.

The Playing Field

The field measures 100 yards long and 53 yards wide. Little white markings on the field called yard markers help the players, officials, and the fans keep track of the ball. Probably the most important part of the field is the end zone. It's an additional 10 yards on each end of the field. This is where the points add up! When the offense - the team with possession of the ball-gets the ball into the opponent's end zone, they score points.

The Players

Each team has 3 separate units: the offense (see section below), those players who are on the field when the team has possession of the ball; the defense (see section below), players who line up to stop the other team's offense; and special teams that only come in on kicking situations (punts, field goals, and kickoffs). Only 11 players are on the field from one team at any one time.

The Offense

Whichever team has possession of the ball is the offense. While only the quarterback, the wide receivers and tight ends, and the running backs can legally handle the ball, it is the quarterback who is the leader of the team and the playmaker.

The Offensive Players

- The quarterback ("QB") passes or hands off the ball.
- The center snaps the ball to the QB and blocks the defense.
- 2 guards and 2 tackles keep the defense at bay.
- 2/4 wide receivers catch the ball thrown by the QB.
- 1 or 2 running backs take the ball and run with it.
- 1 or 2 tight ends block the defense and can also catches passes.

The Defense

The job of the defense is to stop the offense. The 11 men on the defensive team all work together to keep the offense from advancing toward the defense's end zone.

The Defensive Players

- Linebackers defend against the pass, and push forward to stop the run or tackle the QB.
- The defensive line (ends and tackles) battles head-to-head against the offensive line.
- Cornerbacks and safeties defend against the pass from the QB to the wide receiver and help to stop the run.

Game Play

Timing

Games are divided into four 12-minute quarters, separated by a break at halftime.

Officiating

The NYFL typically will have "4" officials at the game, 1 referee, 1 umpire and 2 linesman. A game may start with three officials if agreed upon by both teams.

The Kickoff

A game starts with the kickoff. The ball is placed on a kicking tee at the defense's 40-yard line, and a special kicker (a "placekicker") kicks the ball to the offense. A kick return man from the offense will try to catch the ball and advance it by running. Where he is stopped is the point from which the offense will begin its drive, or series of offensive plays. When a kickoff is caught in the offense's own end zone, the kick returner can either run the ball out of the end zone, or kneel in the end zone to signal a touchback - a sign to stop the play. The ball is then placed on the 20-yard line, where the offense begins play.

First Down

All progress in a football game is measured in yards. The offensive team tries to get as much "yardage" as it can to try and move closer to the opponent's end zone. Each time the offense gets the ball, it has four downs, or chances, in which to gain 10 yards. If the offensive team successfully moves the ball 10 or more yards, it earns a first down, and another set of four downs. If the offense fails to gain 10 yards, it loses possession of the ball. The defense tries to prevent the offense not only from scoring, but also from gaining the 10 yards needed for a first down. If the offense reaches fourth down, it can punt the ball (kick it away), this forces the other team to begin its drive further down the field.

Moving the Ball

The Run and the Pass play begins with the snap. At the line of scrimmage (the position on the field where the play begins), the quarterback loudly calls out a play in code and the player in front of him, the center, passes, or snaps the ball under his legs to the quarterback. From there, the quarterback can either throw the ball, hand it off, or run with it.

- **The Run:** There are two main ways for the offense to advance the ball. The first is called a run. This occurs when the quarterback hands the ball off to a running back, who then tries to gain as many yards as possible by eluding defensive players. The quarterback is also allowed to run with the ball.

- **The Pass:** The other alternative to running the ball is to throw it or pass it. Usually, the quarterback does the passing, though there are times when another player may pass the ball to confuse the defense. Actually, anyone on the offensive team is allowed to pass the ball as long as the pass is thrown from behind the line of scrimmage. A pass is complete if the ball is caught by another offensive player, usually the "wide receiver" or "tight end." If the ball hits the ground before someone catches it, it is called an incomplete pass.

The Tackle

The defense prevents the offense from advancing the ball by bringing the ball carrier to the ground. A player is tackled when one or both of his knees touch the ground. The play is then over. A play also ends when a player runs out of bounds.

Turnovers

While trying to advance the football to the end zone, the offense may accidentally turn the ball over to the defense in one of two ways:

- **The Fumble:** When the ball carrier or passer drops the ball, that's a fumble. Any player on the field can recover the ball by diving on it or he can run with it. The team that recovers a fumble either gets-or retains-possession of the ball.
- **The Interception:** An aggressive defense can regain possession of the ball by catching (intercepting) passes meant for players on the other team. Both fumble recoveries and interceptions can be run back into the end zone for touchdowns. Also referred to as a *pick*.

Helpful Terms and Definitions

Audible: When the quarterback changes the football play at the line of scrimmage.

Backfield: This is the area of the football field behind the line of scrimmage.

Backs: These football players include the running backs, the halfback and the fullback.

Blitz: A football play where the defensive team rushes more football players than usual to try and sack the quarterback.

Blocking: What the offensive team does to prevent a defensive player from getting to the football carrier; Blockers use their arms and bodies to get in the way, but may not grab onto (hold) an opponent.

Bump-and-run: When pass defenders hit a receiver once and then follow him to prevent him from catching a pass.

Eligible receiver: Only certain football players on the offense are allowed by the rules to catch a forward pass; All the linemen and the quarterback are not eligible unless they notify the referee before the snap. The linemen must stand at least one yard behind the line of scrimmage.

Encroachment: A penalty when any football player other than the center is in the neutral zone and contact occurs prior to the snap.

End zone: This is the area where the football team must enter with the football to score a touchdown.

Extra point: After a football team has scored a touchdown, they have the opportunity to score extra points via the point-after-touchdown (1 point) or a 2-point conversion (2 points).

Fair catch: The player making a football kick return can decide to catch a punt or kickoff and not advance the football. He must signal for a fair catch by raising one hand in the air and waving it.

Field goal: The kicker must kick the football above the crossbar and between the uprights of the goalpost. The football team that kicked the football gets 3 points.

Forward pass: When the football is thrown by a football player (typically the quarterback) towards the opponent's goal line. On a play from scrimmage, only one forward pass can be thrown by the football team and it must be thrown from behind the line of scrimmage.

Forward progress: The spot where a football carrier has moved the football regardless of whether he was pushed backwards from that spot.

Fumble: When a football player drops the football. Whoever picks it up will gain possession for his team.

Goalpost: The structure in the end zone that the kicker must kick the football through to score an extra point or a field goal.

Holding: A penalty where a football player stops the movement of an opponent by grasping or holding onto his body or uniform.

Intentional grounding: A penalty when the quarterback purposely throws an incomplete pass just to avoid a sack.

Interception: A pass that is caught by a football player on the defense.

Kickoff: When a football player kicks the football to the other team. This happens at the start of the game, the second half and overtime, and after each score.

Lateral: A pass thrown that is backwards from the team's line of scrimmage. Football players may lateral the football as many times per play as they want.

Line of scrimmage: The place on the field where the football is spotted and the next play starts.

Lineman: The offensive and defensive football players who start each play at the line of scrimmage.

Neutral zone: The area between the offense and defense where the football sits on the ground before each play.

Nickel defense: When the defense brings in a 5th defensive back to help cover the pass play.

Offside: A penalty that occurs when any part of a football player's body is beyond his line of scrimmage when the football is snapped.

Pass protection: Blocking by the offensive football players to keep defenders away from the quarterback to give him time to throw the football.

Pass rush: When a defender tries to get by the blockers to sack the quarterback.

Personal foul: A penalty for any action that had intent to cause injury to another football player.

Place kick: When the kicker tries to kick the football between the goal post. The football is held by another player between his finger and the ground.

Play-action pass: When the quarterback fakes handing off the football, then tries to make a pass.

Pocket: The area where the quarterback stands and is protected from the rush by his blockers.

Punt: When a football team kicks the football to the other team rather than loose the football on downs. The kicker holds the football in his hands and kicks it to the other football team.

Quarterback: This is the football player that starts each play. He takes the snap from the center and either runs with it, hands off the football to another player, or passes it.

Receivers: The football players who catch the football.

Rush: When the football player runs with the football.

Sack: When the quarterback is tackled behind the line of scrimmage.

Safety: When a football player is tackled in his own end zone. The defense gets 2 points and the football off of a free kick.

Scrambling: When the quarterback runs around trying not to get sacked with the football.

Snap: Sometimes called the hike. The center hands off the football between his legs to a player standing behind him (usually the quarterback) at the start of each play.

Special teams: These are the football players who are involved in the kicking plays.

Spot: Where the official decides the line of scrimmage will be for the start of the next football play.

Tackle:

1. A football player position on the offensive or defensive line. There are two of them and they play on each side of the center or the nose guard.
2. When a football player causes the football carrier to touch the ground such that they are considered down.

Touchdown: The main object of football. When a player has control of the football within the end zone his team gets 6 points.

Turnover: When, with either a fumble or an interception, one team loses possession of the football to the other.