

A Simplified Explanation of American Football

what each sport is called everywhere else in the world	football	American football
what each sport is called in the United States	soccer	football

similarities:

- soccer (is *most popular sport* in world, *World Cup*), football (is *most popular sport* in U.S. for spectators, *Super Bowl*).
- one team *tries to move the ball* in one direction, but their opponents *try to move the ball* in the other direction.
- levels of age and skill: as with soccer, football is played by children and in high school, college, professional (NFL, CFL, Arena,...).

differences

- in soccer, players kick a *round ball* with their feet, in football they carry or throw an *oval-shaped ball* with their hands.
- in soccer the action is (almost) continuous, but in football it's stop-and-go with pauses between each "play".
- *player substitutions* are *limited in soccer*, are *unlimited in football* with "specialists" who play either offense or defense.

Football Field is 100 yards long plus two *end zones* (10 yards each) and 53 yards wide. (100 yards = 91.4 meters)

Basic Strategy: offense (team with ball) can score points but opposing defense tries to prevent this; offense tries to move ball in one direction, defense tries to stop them; offense & defense each have 11 players, and deciding "how to use them" is analogous to military strategy. (fascinating details in person, later in talk)

A Play begins when offensive *center* "snaps" the ball by giving it to a teammate, and this play ends when a player holding the ball is tackled and *his body touches the ground*, or *ball touches ground after forward pass*, or *ball goes out of bounds* over a field-sideline.

Basic Rhythm: offensive team has 4 plays to move ball 10 yards or more; if they fail, other team gets ball and they become the offense; if a team fails to move 10 yards in 3 plays (on 1st down, 2nd down, 3rd down), on 4th down they have 3 options; they can try to get a [new] first down by finishing 10-yard move (if success they keep ball, if failure other team gets ball at point of failure), or punt the ball (give it away, kick it far downfield), or try a 3-point field goal (if placekicker kicks ball through goal posts in end zone).

Line of Scrimmage is defined by front (nose) of ball, extends sideways to separate offense (on one side) and defense (other side).

Moving the Ball with a Run or Pass: an offensive player can run with the ball, or throw it *backward* to another player who runs with it; or, in a *forward pass* a player (usually the quarterback) throws ball in the forward direction to a teammate and thus moves it *quickly* down field. (run after catch!) (forward pass thrown from behind line of scrimmage; only one forward pass allowed per play)

Turnovers: the ball is given to the defense after an unsuccessful 4th down play by the offense; or defense can get the ball before this in a *turnover* (a *takeway*) if they recover a fumble (when ball is dropped by an offensive player, or is pulled away or is knocked away by a defensive player) or intercept a forward pass (by catching a passed ball that was intended for offensive player).

Placement of Players: defensive players can begin a play anywhere on their own side of the line of scrimmage; offense has rules for where its players can begin — 7 must be on (near) line of scrimmage (one common placement strategy is "tight end, *tackle, guard, center, guard, tackle, wide receiver*" where *italicized* players are *linemen*) and 4 are behind it (often quarterback, tailback & fullback, flanker [*receiver, wide receiver, wideout*]); a forward pass (usually thrown by quarterback) can go to any of the other 5 non-lineman, and any non-lineman can run with the ball; some pre-snap motion not OK. A common defensive strategy is 4 linemen, 3 linebackers, and 4 defensive backs (2 cornerbacks and 2 safeties). But many other placement-strategies (by offense or defense) are possible.

Strategies: analogous to military strategy, major decisions (by offense & defense) are initial placement of players and what they do after a play begins; some actions are planned by coaches (or quarterback, or defensive leader) but some are improvised by players during a play; there are many options for an offense & defense, and effective strategy requires clever thinking and careful planning. coaching staffs (Green Bay Packers have 18 coaches!) watch films of next opponent, computer-split into categories: what things (and what % of time) does the opponent's offense do on 1st down? 2nd? 3rd? down-and-distance: 3rd & 1? 3rd & 4? 3rd & 8? 4th and 1? also — behind or ahead in score? time left in game? / similar categories for what opponent's defense does in these situations. / Surprise Principle: defense tries to be prepared for what they think - in their *educated guess* - the offense might do (so they can stop it) so - also making *educated guesses* - the offense tries to do things the defense won't be prepared for and offense is skilled at doing. For both offense & defense, the goal is optimal use of their players; but another important factor is having good players.

Required Characteristics for Players: physical skills (speed, strength, endurance, coordination,...) plus mental skills (memory, quick evaluation-and-decision,...); ideal combination varies with position: big/strong (linemen, O > D) to fast (receiver, cornerback) and in-between with medium-strong/medium-fast (linebackers), slightly-strong/fairly-fast (fullback, tight end), fast (tailback, safety); but... tailbacks can be fast and/or strong (to escape tackling); receivers (know "route") usually taller than cornerbacks (must adjust).

How to get Players: college coaches recruit (get players by persuasion, re: education, winning, location, future,...), professional teams draft (worst teams get first choice of players graduating from college) or recruit free agents (veteran players, re: money,...).

Scoring: 6 points for touchdown (carry ball into opponent's end zone) plus opportunity for 1 or 2 extra points (1 for kicking ball through goal posts, 2 if run or pass it over goal line in one play); 3 points for field goal (kick ball through goal posts); after these the scoring team "kicks off" so other team becomes the offense. 2 points for safety (if you tackle offensive player in his own end zone) and the team scoring the 2 points also gets the ball kicked to them so they become the offense.

Penalties: offsides (defense over line of scrimmage), placement (offense, illegal position or "motion"), un-necessary roughness (especially if action might cause injury), pass interference (usually by defense, but also offense), and (all by offense) delay of game, ineligible receiver; and many others.

Time of Game: 60 minutes in 4 quarters; clock stops for timeout, halftime, instant replay, or incomplete pass; total > 3 hours.

Social Aspects: UW fans wear red, tribal pride, pre-game tailgates (party: bratwurst, beer,...), tv bar, watching collision sport.