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.

Football allows perhaps the roughest physical contact of any team sport. However, two variations on tackle football, called “touch football” and “flag football” respectively, 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. 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.
  - Camp refined the scrimmage and introduced the role of the quarterback, now considered the most exciting position on the team.
  - He altered the number of players on a team from the traditional 15 of rugby to the 11.
  - Camp was also the person who finalized the alignment of the 11 players into 7 forwards, a quarterback, two halfbacks and a fullback.
Changes to the Game

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- 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.
- Camp introduced was regulations for scoring; specifically, giving points to different scoring methods. Current scoring allows 6 points for a touchdown, 1 pt. for a kick through goal posts after a touchdown, 3 points for a field goal, and 2 points for entering the end zone after a touchdown.
- 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.
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.

- 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.

- A “punt” entails dropping the ball and kicking it before it touches the ground.

A 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
Penalties

Teams are typically penalized five, ten or fifteen yards, depending on the type of foul committed.
- Five-yard penalties 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. They include blocking from behind, butting another player with a helmet and running into/tackling the passer once the ball has been thrown.
Equipment

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.
- Mouthpieces protect the mouth and face.
- Special cleated shoes are also worn.
- 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.
Review

- Why is American–style football often called the “gridiron sport?”
- What is the composition of a typical football field and where is the “end zone?” What are the dimensions?
- What is a kick–off in football?
- How is a first down made and what advantage does it give the team that makes it?
- What options does a team have if it has not gained 10 yards by the fourth down?
- For what four reasons may the clock be stopped?
- Fifteen–yard penalties are given for what kinds of offenses?
- What kinds of protective gear and clothing does a football player need to wear?
- Who is considered the father of American Football?
- What position is considered the offensive leader on the field?