

Chapter 1

The A,B,C's of Pro Football



Let's take our first step toward the love and understanding that we talked about in the Introduction by starting out with some football basics and terms and go from there.

Object

The object is to advance the ball down the field and score **Touchdowns** (6 points) and **Field Goals** (3 points), while attempting to keep your opponent from doing the same. The winner is the one that scores the most points. Simple enough.

Remember the game “keep away” that you used to play as a kid? Think of football in those terms. Throughout a game, the opposing teams trade possession of the ball numerous times. In football, you want to be the one with the ball, because if you don't have the ball, you can't score! The amount of time each team has possession in a game is called its **time of possession**. This is a very critical aspect of football which we will discuss later in more detail.



The Ball

I would be remiss in my description of the game if I didn't briefly describe what the players are trying to get their hands on. A regulation NFL football is an oblong sphere, approximately 11 inches

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Chapter 1 - The A,B,C's of Pro Football

long, and is slightly pointed at either end. It has a lengthwise circumference of about 28 ½ inches, a width wide circumference of about 21 ½ inches, and weighs between 14 - 15 ounces. The exterior is made of leather, with white laces in the center that are used for gripping when throwing the ball.

Length of a Game

A game is composed of four **quarters**. The 1st and 2nd quarters make up the first half and the 3rd and 4th quarters comprise the second half, with a break between halves called **half time**. Each quarter is fifteen minutes as timed by the **game clock**, although in reality, the quarters are longer. This is because the game clock is stopped several times throughout the game for various reasons (See Chapter 4 - “Play It Again”).

In terms of how much time to set aside to watch an NFL game, figure about three hours. What better way to spend a Sunday afternoon?

If the game is tied at the end of **regulation** (four quarters), it goes into overtime. The first team that scores in overtime is the winner. If neither team scores after fifteen minutes, the game ends in a tie.

So if you're really lucky, you can spend even longer than three hours watching a game.

The Players



An NFL team is comprised of 53 players that make up the following units:

- Offense (Offensive Unit)
- Defense (Defensive Unit)
- Special Teams (Special Teams Units)

Chapter 1 - The A,B,C's of Pro Football

These units are referred to as the three **phases** of the game. The team that has the advantage in at least two of the phases usually comes out on top.

In the NFL, a player normally plays either on Offense or Defense, not both. The players from these two units that start and play in every game are called **starters**, and the ones that normally don't play very much are called **reserves**. Reserves comprise the majority of the players on Special Teams.

During a game, each team has eleven players on the field. The unit that has the ball and is trying to score is the Offense, and the unit without the ball, trying to keep its opponent from scoring is the Defense. These are the units that are on the field most of the time. Special Teams are on the field at certain points during the game. You will know that Special Teams are on the field any time you see someone kicking the ball.



The Coaches

There are many coaches on a football team; some on Offense, some on Defense, some on Special Teams. The head guy is the **Head Coach** - he's the one in charge of all the other coaches; the one most likely to be pacing nervously along the sidelines during a game.

Next in line are the **Offensive Coordinator** and **Defensive Coordinator**, who pretty much oversee what goes on offensively and defensively. If a team is struggling on Offense, people will start pointing fingers at the Offensive Coordinator, and if a team is doing

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Chapter 1 - The A,B,C's of Pro Football

poorly defensively, look for people to start blaming the Defensive Coordinator.

Let's learn some more terms, shall we:

Touchdown (TD) - When the ball is advanced past the plane of the opposing team's goal line while in the **ball carrier's** (player with the ball) possession (See Chapter 3 - "What's the Score?"). Each team strives to score touchdowns, worth six points.

Field Goal (FG) - When the Kicker on the Field Goal Unit (one of the Special Teams Units) kicks the ball between the uprights of the opposing team's goal post (See Chapter 3 - "What's the Score?"). A field goal is worth three points.

Play - Each attempt made by the Offense to advance the ball down the field. There are two types of plays: rushing and passing (See Chapter 4 - "Play It Again").



Tackle

On any given play, everything centers on the ball carrier. The opposing team attempts to **tackle** (bring to the ground with much force) the ball carrier. The ball carrier is considered tackled if any part of his body other than his foot or hand touches the ground.

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Chapter 1 - The A,B,C's of Pro Football



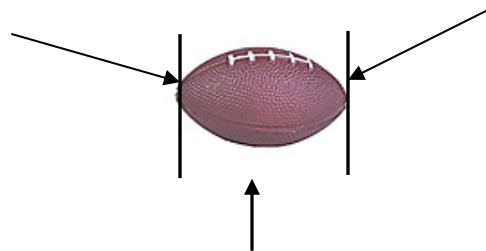
Fumble

When the ball carrier loses possession of the ball. Once he fumbles, anyone (including the ball carrier) can **recover** it (get possession of the ball). If the ball carrier loses possession of the ball after he hits the ground upon being tackled, it is NOT a fumble. He is said to be down by contact - or in other words, the *ground cannot cause a fumble*.

Interception (INT) - When a player on Offense throws a **forward pass** (ball thrown forward) that is intended for a teammate but is caught by a Defensive player. Once a player makes an interception, he can continue to run with the ball until he is either tackled, goes out-of-bounds, or scores a touchdown. An interception is also referred to as a **pick**.

Turnover - When a team unwillingly turns possession of the ball over to its opponent, either through an interception or fumble, or in other words, "turns the ball over." From an Offense's perspective, a turnover is a **giveaway** and from a Defense's perspective, a **takeaway**.

Line of scrimmage - Two imaginary lines that run through the tips of the ball when it is on the ground at the start of a play. The opposing teams line up opposite one another on either side of the line of scrimmage.



Neutral zone - The area between the lines of scrimmage (*or*, the length of the ball, when it is on the ground at the start of a play). No

Chapter 1 - The A,B,C's of Pro Football

player, other than the **Center** (one of the players on Offense) may be in or beyond the neutral zone at the start of a play.

Kickoff - When a team kicks the ball to its opponent to start the game. Kickoffs also take place at the start of the second half and after a field goal or conversion attempt following a touchdown.

Punt - When a team gives up possession of the ball by kicking it to the opposing team. The punt is made by the Punter, who drops the ball and kicks it before it hits the ground.

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Chapter 1 - The A,B,C's of Pro Football

It's time for our first quiz. Remember, if you can't find an answer, just look at the end of the guide.

Quiz



1. Which of the three units is on the field the least amount of time during a game?
2. How many points is a touchdown worth?
3. A field goal is worth how many points?
4. What is a turnover?
5. From an Offense's standpoint, what is a turnover referred to as?
6. The amount of time that a team has possession of the ball throughout the game is called what?
7. What is it called when a Defensive player catches a pass that is intended for a player on Offense?
8. And what is the answer to #7 sometimes referred to as?
9. Each player usually plays on both Offense *and* Defense. True or False?
10. What is each quarter timed by?

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