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**5th Edition**

# Football

FOR  
**DUMMIES®**  
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## **Learn to:**

- Tackle football basics and enjoy America's favorite sport
- Grasp the rules and regulations, positions, plays, and penalties
- Appreciate the different aspects of the game at the professional and college levels



**Howie Long**

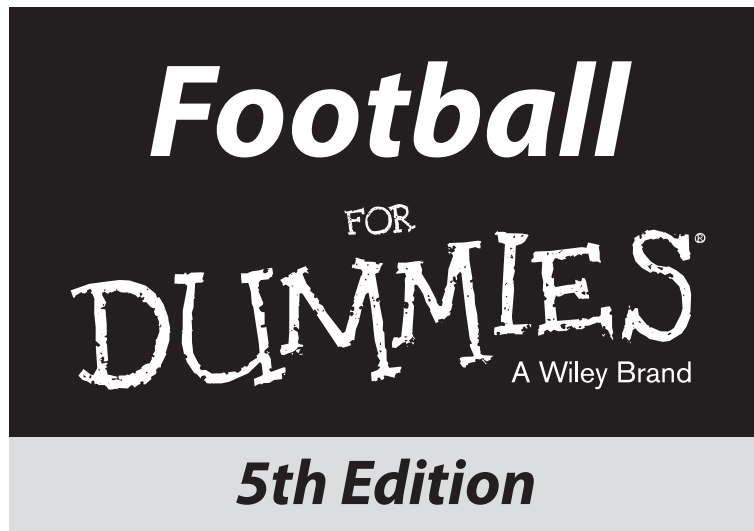
*Pro Football Hall of Famer*

**with John Czarnecki**

*Pro Football Consultant*







**by Howie Long with John Czarnecki**



## **Football For Dummies®, 5th Edition**

Published by: **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**, 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774, [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com)

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Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2015937670

ISBN 978-1-119-02263-3 (pbk); ISBN 978-1-119-02265-7 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-119-02264-0 (ebk)

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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# Introduction

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**M**illions of people across the United States are intrigued by football — all types and levels of it. These people may have friends or family who have made the football season a ritual, from the last weekend in August through the college bowl games in December until Super Bowl Sunday at the start of February. To be a part of that experience, you need to have a working knowledge of the game.

*Football For Dummies*, 5th Edition, serves to give you that knowledge and help you better facilitate interaction with your friends, family, or whoever you watch football with. For many people, on the surface, football seems to be a complicated game. Twenty-two players are on the field at one time, plus a number of officials. The intricacies of first down, second down, and third down, and everything from how many offensive linemen there are to what the quarterback really does or doesn't do all need to be explained and simplified. This book will help; that's why I decided to write it.

I think football is far less intimidating when you have a basic working knowledge of the game. After you break through that initial fear of being overwhelmed by football and what you don't understand, everything else about the game falls into place. You begin to see the game clearly, like when you wipe the early morning dew off your windshield — suddenly everything becomes crystal clear.

Today I know a lot more about the game as a whole than I did when I was a player. I played in high school and in college, plus I played for 13 seasons in the National Football League (NFL). But being a television analyst — 2015 will be my 22nd season working for FOX Sports — has forced me to learn even more about this game that I love.

As a player, I had a working knowledge of the passing game, of how a secondary works in coverages, and of the offensive and defensive line formations. I also had a working knowledge of general managers, scouts, and head coaches. But working as an analyst, I've been forced to cover the entire game. I no longer view football from a defensive lineman's perspective. Instead, I look at football as a whole. And I'm still learning every day. That never changes. I don't think you'll ever stop learning when it comes to football. It's the same for everyone — the players, the fans, the coaches, and the television experts. So don't feel alone out there.

## About This Book

I wrote *Football For Dummies*, 5th Edition, to help you find out what you want to know about football. Therefore, I don't expect you to read every single page in order. Sure, you can read the book from front to back if you want, but if you'd rather skip around and just read about the topics that interest you, that's fine, too.

And I don't make you remember obscure facts from earlier chapters to make sense of later chapters. If you need to know something that I cover in an earlier chapter, I either define it again or refer you to the chapter that contains the information. Also, if you don't know certain football jargon, you can turn to the Appendix, which explains some of the most common terms. What could be simpler?

I also use diagrams — you know, those X and O things — to show you what I'm talking about when I describe lineups, formations, and plays. So you aren't left wondering what all those little symbols mean, here's a key to the diagrams used in this book:

O Offensive player

X Offensive center

⓪ Offensive player with defender lined up on left shoulder

⓪ Offensive player with defender lined up on right shoulder

▲ Defensive player

→ Path of offensive player

—| Spot where offensive player stops to block or catch a pass

----- Pass

..... Pitchout

## Foolish Assumptions

Here's what I'm assuming about you: You're interested in football and want to get familiar with the sport, including its history, so you can watch games

in person and on television, follow all the action, and enjoy football games to the hilt. You may not know much about football, but I know that you're no dummy either. You may, however, have burning questions like these:

- ✓ Is the ball really made of pigskin, or is that an inside joke?
- ✓ Why do you get six points for a touchdown but only three points for a field goal?
- ✓ Does it really matter how all those guys line up on the field?
- ✓ Does it really mean something when the officials do those funny signals with their arms, or are they just bored out there?

This book answers all these questions and more.

## *Icons Used in This Book*

To help you navigate your way through this book, I place icons in the margins. These little pictures point you to a particular type of information. Here's a list of the icons in this book and what they mean:



A book about football wouldn't be the same without tales of the sport's greats. This icon flags stories about the game's greatest, most recognized players.



Being a commentator, I can't help but want to throw in my two cents once in a while. When I have my own tale to tell on a subject, I mark it with this icon.



When you see this icon, you know you're reading a piece of information that's especially important to remember. If you take away nothing else from this book but the paragraphs flagged with this icon, you'll have a solid understanding of football.



Look for this icon if you want to know all the helpful tidbits of info that can make you a more informed fan.

## *Beyond the Book*

This book provides great information to help you learn about football, but you can find many more resources on [Dummies.com](http://Dummies.com):

- ✓ You can download the book's Cheat Sheet at [www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/football](http://www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/football). It's a handy resource to keep on your computer, tablet, or smartphone.
- ✓ You can read interesting companion articles that supplement the book's content at [www.dummies.com/extras/football](http://www.dummies.com/extras/football). I even include an extra top-ten list.

## *Where to Go from Here*

So you're geared up and ready to play, metaphorically speaking. Where you go from here depends on the type of information you're looking for. If you want a primer on football starting at square one, head to Chapter 1. If you want to know about how a particular phase of the game — say, the offensive line or the kicking game — works, head to that specific chapter. And if you want to read about some of the greatest players in football history, head to Part VI. Wherever you start, enjoy the game!

## Part I

# Getting Started with Football



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## ***In this part . . .***

- ✓ Get an overview of football's history, the players and personnel involved, and the roots of the world's greatest game
- ✓ Look at the field and equipment and the meanings behind the uniforms
- ✓ Review the rules of football and understand its ins and outs

# Chapter 1

## America's Greatest Game

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Discovering why football is America's passion
- ▶ Looking back on football's progression throughout the years
- ▶ Figuring out how the modern football season works
- ▶ Recognizing what makes college games so much fun and the Super Bowl such a major event

When I was 14, a sophomore in high school, I moved out of Boston to live with my uncle. During my first weekend in Milford, Massachusetts, I saw my first high school football game. I had never seen anything like it. Before the game, an antique fire engine led a parade on the track around the football field while the crowd clapped and cheered. The players then thundered across a wooden bridge over a pond and burst through a banner to enter the stadium. I said to myself, “Wow, this game is for me.”

I wasn't necessarily drawn to the game itself; I simply loved what came with the sport: *respect*. For me, football was an opportunity to belong to something, giving me confidence for the first time in my life. It was more of a personal thing than it was about playing football. It wasn't so much the football, but what football did for me. Football gave me a sense of self-worth, which I've carried with me throughout my life.

Sure, I experienced down periods when I first started playing, but I never thought about quitting. My first high school coach, Dick Corbin, was great to me and encouraged me to continue playing the game. Believe me, coaches are important. I've always had the support of football coaches, both on *and* off the field.

Football is responsible for everything that I've accomplished in my life. The discipline and hard work that made me a successful athlete have helped me in other areas of my life, allowing me to venture into new careers in movies and television.

## *Why Football Is the Best*

Baseball may be America's pastime, but football is America's passion. Football is the only team sport in America that conjures up visions of Roman gladiators, pitting city versus city, state versus state — sometimes with a Civil War feel, like when the Jets play the Giants in New York or the Dallas Cowboys play the Washington Redskins.

Football is played in all weather conditions — snow, rain, and sleet — with temperatures on the playing field ranging from –30 to 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Whatever the conditions may be, the game goes on. And unlike other major sports, the football playoff system, in the National Football League (NFL) anyway, is a single-elimination tournament. In other words, the NFL has no playoff series; the playoffs are do-or-die, culminating in what has become the single biggest one-day sporting event in America: the Super Bowl.

Or, in simpler terms, anytime you stick 22 men in high-tech plastic helmets on a football field and have them continually run great distances at incredible speeds and slam into each other, people will watch.

Football has wedged itself into the American culture. In fact, in many small towns across the United States, the centerpiece is the Friday night high school football game. The NFL doesn't play on Fridays simply to protect this great part of Americana, in which football often gives schools and even towns a certain identity. For example, hard-core fans know that tiny Massillon, Ohio, is where the late, great Paul Brown of the Cleveland Browns began his coaching career. To this day, Massillon's high school has maintained a tremendous high school football tradition. With so many factions of the student body involved, plus their families, a strong core of fans is built. For many, this enthusiasm for football continues in college.

You may not think it now, but millions of people are familiar with the strategy of the game, and most of them pass it down through their families. A lot of fathers coach their sons, and on rare occasions, their daughters. Although the focus may have changed in today's society, at one time the only team that mattered in high school was the football team. The pace of the game — stoppage after every play with a huddle — is perfect for most fans because it allows them time to guess what the team will try next.

## Football is *it* in the United States

Since 1985, Harris Interactive (a global marketing research firm) has been conducting polls to determine which sport is the most popular in the United States. Pro football has been ranked number 1 in 30 straight polls. In 2014, 35 percent of Americans polled chose pro football as

their favorite sport. Baseball came in second at 14 percent. Guess which sport came in third? That would be college football at 11 percent. Any way you slice it, football is unquestionably the most popular spectator sport in the United States.



On two particular holidays, sitting down and watching football has become an American tradition:

- ✓ **Thanksgiving Day** is reserved for a turkey dinner with the family, followed by a pro football game. The Detroit Lions started the tradition in 1934, and in 2014 they played in their 75th Thanksgiving Day game. There have been at least two pro football games on Thanksgiving Day every year since 1960. Since 2006, fans have enjoyed three games on that holiday.
- ✓ **New Year's Day** has long been the day for college football bowl games, which generally match up some of the nation's finest teams.

## Who's Playing Football

Football is suited to all sizes of athletes. Larger athletes generally play on the offensive and defensive lines — what are called the *trenches*. Leaner athletes who are faster and quicker generally play the skill positions, such as quarterback, running back, and receiver. But no matter how big or how talented you are, you must have inner courage to play football. This game requires strength and perseverance. If you don't believe you're tough enough to play, then you probably shouldn't try.

And if you're not up to the full-force-hitting variety of football, you can still enjoy the sport as a player. Touch football is totally different from tackle football. All you need are a ball and maybe six players, three per team. Anyone can play this game, and the players decide the rules and the size of the field at the start of the game. I've seen people playing touch football on the streets of New York City and in parks and front lawns all across America — the beauty of the game is that you can play anywhere.



Of all the team sports, football is the most violent and dangerous, with hockey a distant second. I played football for respect, and I believe that it builds character. Considering some of the problems in society today, football can give a youngster's life some structure and can also teach discipline. All the players who belong to a football team are in the struggle together, sharing in the joy and the pain of the sport. Every play can be such an adrenaline rush.

## How Football Began

Just as many fans get caught up in the hype and hoopla of today's NFL, many others love the game for its sense of tradition. The game itself has endured for more than 140 years.

Games involving kicking a ball into a goal on a lined field have existed for more than 2,000 years. American football evolved from two particular games that were popular in other parts of the world: soccer (as it's known in the United States) and rugby. Both the Romans and the Spartans (remember that movie *Spartacus*? Now those guys were tough!) played some version of soccer. Soccer and rugby came to North America in the 19th century, and historians have noted that the first form of American football emerged on November 6, 1869, when teams from Princeton and Rutgers, two New Jersey universities, competed in a game of what was closer to rugby than football. Rutgers won that game 6–4.

The following sections introduce you to the contributions of two key individuals in the football world: Walter Camp and Harold “Red” Grange.

## Camp defines the rules



Walter Camp, a sensational player at Yale University and a driving force behind many football rules, is known as the father of American football. Around 1876, when football was already being played in universities on the East Coast and in Canada, Camp helped write the game's first rules. In 1880, he authored rules that reduced the number of players per team from 15 to 11 (today's total) and replaced the rugby scrum with the center snap to put the ball in play. (In a *scrum*, players from both sides bunch tightly together, butting heads while the ball is thrown between them. The players then try to gain possession of the ball with their feet. Using your hands to gain possession is unique to American football — both rugby and soccer forbid it.)

Camp also championed the rule that a team needed to gain 5 yards in three plays in order to maintain possession. Today, teams must gain 10 yards in four plays. (Head to Chapter 3 for more information about these and other rules.)

Camp devised plays and formations and instituted referees. However, his biggest proposal was tackling, which was introduced in 1888. *Tackling* — the act of hitting players below the waist — made the game more violent. It also popularized an offensive strategy known as the *flying wedge*, where an entire team (ten players) would mass in front of one ball carrier in the form of a wedge. Football was almost banned in 1906 after a dozen and a half deaths (and many more serious injuries in the preceding season), but President Theodore Roosevelt saved the game by convincing college representatives to initiate stricter rules to make the game less brutal and dangerous.



Football has been cleaned up a great deal over the years and has come a long way from clothesline shots and quarterbacks taking late hits and direct blows to the head. But let's not kid one another: Football is a high-impact collision sport, and with collision comes pain and injury. Even with the rules being adjusted to protect today's quarterbacks, rarely does a Monday morning come without the news that at least one quarterback sustained a concussion. Players are bigger, faster, and stronger. Let me put it this way: You're driving down the road traveling at 35 miles per hour. Would you rather be met head-on by a car of similar size or by a truck? Well, that's the difference between 20 years ago and now. Only thing is, the truck's now going 45 miles per hour rather than 35.

## *Grange helps spread the popularity of pro ball*

Americans started playing football in colleges and on club teams in the 1870s. Football became a source of identity for collegians and a regular Saturday afternoon activity by the turn of the century.

In the first 90 years of football, college football was far more popular than pro football; it was (and still is, at many schools) all about tradition and the many rivalries between colleges. Ninety years ago, having more than 50,000 fans attend a great college game wasn't unusual. During that same period, games in the NFL, which officially began in 1920, were fortunate to draw 5,000 fans.



Two days after the 1925 college season ended, Illinois All-American halfback Harold “Red” Grange (see Figure 1-1) signed a contract to play with the struggling Chicago Bears. On Thanksgiving Day of that year, 36,000 fans — the largest crowd in pro football history at that time — watched Grange and the Bears play the league’s top team, the Chicago Cardinals, to a scoreless tie in Cubs Park (now called Wrigley Field, the home of the Chicago Cubs baseball team). The Bears went on to play a barnstorming tour, and in New York’s Polo Grounds, more than 73,000 fans watched Grange — nicknamed “the Galloping Ghost” — compete against the New York Giants. Although Grange did attract new fans to the pro game, fewer than 30,000 fans attended championship games in the early 1930s.

Pro football emerged as an equal to college football after its games began being televised nationally in the 1960s, but it took decades for the NFL to supplant college football. And to this day, many colleges have as much fan support as some NFL franchises. Universities such as Nebraska, USC, and Notre Dame can claim more fans than, say, the Atlanta Falcons.



**Figure 1-1:**  
Harold  
“Red”  
Grange,  
known  
as “the  
Galloping  
Ghost,”  
played for  
the Chicago  
Bears in  
1925.

*Photo credit: © New York Times Co./Getty Images*



## Football immortals

With every sport comes a list of immortals — those great players who nurtured the game and made it what it is today. Following are some of the early legends of American football:

- ✓ **John W. Heisman:** The annual award given to the nation's best college player — the Heisman Trophy — is named after this Brown University (and later University of Pennsylvania) player. Heisman was also a member of New York's Downtown Athletic Club, where the award was presented every December until the building was damaged in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Heisman was an early advocate of the forward pass.
- ✓ **Fritz Pollard:** Pollard starred for Brown University in 1915 and 1916 and was the first African American player to appear in the Rose Bowl. He's also considered the first African American football player to turn professional, the first to be selected to the college All-American team, and the first African American pro head coach (of the Akron Pros in 1921). In 1954, he became the first African American inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame.
- ✓ **Amos Alonzo Stagg:** Stagg was a famous University of Chicago coach who developed the "Statue of Liberty" play, in which a halfback takes the ball from the quarterback who has his hands raised as if to throw a forward pass. (I explain offensive positions in Part II.) He was also the first coach to put numbers on players' uniforms.
- ✓ **Jim Thorpe:** A Native American who won the decathlon and pentathlon in the 1912 Stockholm Olympics, Thorpe was an All-American at Carlisle (Pennsylvania) Indian School and was the first big-time American athlete to play pro football. He was paid the princely sum of \$250 to play a game for the Canton Bulldogs in 1915. Today, Canton, Ohio, is the home of the Pro Football Hall of Fame.
- ✓ **Pop Warner:** The national tackle youth league (described in Chapter 15) is named after this famous coach, who developed the single-wing formation, which snaps the ball directly to the running back and has four linemen to one side of the center and two to the other side. Warner was the first to use the hidden ball trick, in which an offensive lineman slipped the ball under his jersey. The first "hunchback play" went for a touchdown against Harvard in 1902.

## How the Football Season Is Set Up Today

Football as an organized sport has come a long way since the early years. Teams at every level play during a standard season and are governed by various football leagues, such as the NFL and NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association).



The heart of the football season is during the fall months. However, training camps, practices, and preseason games often begin in the summer, and playoffs and bowl games are staged after Christmas and into February. Here's how the season breaks down for each level of play:

- ✔ **High school football teams** usually play between eight and ten games in a season, starting after Labor Day. If teams have successful league seasons, they advance to regional or state playoff tournaments. Some schools in Texas play as many as 15 games if they advance to the state championship game. Most high school teams play in a regional league, although some travel 50 to 100 miles to play opponents. You can find out more about high school football in Chapter 15.
- ✔ **College football teams** play between 10 and 13 games, the majority in a specific conference — Pac-12, Big Ten, SEC, ACC, and so on. The top teams in the Division I FBS (Football Bowl Subdivision), which constitute the largest schools that offer the most money for athletic scholarships, advance via invitation to postseason bowl games or a four-team playoff for the national championship. Beginning with the 2014–2015 season, the top four teams play in two semifinal games, with the winners facing each other in the College Football Championship Game. This playoff system replaced the controversial BCS system, which had been in place from 1998 through the 2013–2014 season. Read more about college football in Chapter 16.
- ✔ **NFL teams** play 16 regular-season games, preceded by a minimum of 4 preseason games that are played in August. The 32 NFL teams are divided into two conferences, the NFC (National Football Conference) and the AFC (American Football Conference), and the four division leaders and two wild card teams from each conference advance to the playoffs with hopes of reaching the Super Bowl, which is played in early February. Chapter 17 gives you all the details about the NFL.

Football is pretty much a weekend sport, although a few games are played on Monday and Thursday, particularly in the NFL. In general, however, the football season, which begins in earnest right around Labor Day, follows this orderly pattern:

- ✔ High school games are usually played on Friday nights.
- ✔ College games are played on Saturdays, mostly during the day, although a few are held on Thursday and Friday nights.
- ✔ The NFL plays on Sundays for the most part. For television purposes, games are played in the early and late afternoon (Eastern time).

## *How Television Helped Increase Football's Popularity*

Today, most football fans are introduced to the game through television, which brings the game right into everyone's home. The action in a football game translates well to television. The field and all the action that takes place upon it fit just as nicely on a big screen as they do on a smaller model. Because television networks use up to 20 cameras for most games, viewers rarely miss out on plays. And with replay machines, the networks can show critical plays from several different angles, including a viewer-friendly angle for fans watching at home or at the neighborhood tavern.

Television shows like *FOX NFL Sunday* also help to make the game more personal by promoting the personalities under the helmets. Fans, for example, can watch and listen to a Drew Brees interview and feel like they know the New Orleans quarterback as a person.

In addition, with round-the-clock NFL coverage on sports cable networks like ESPN, FOX Sports, and the NFL Network, fans can tune in pretty much 24 hours a day to get the latest news and updates about their favorite players and teams. This kind of coverage keeps football at the forefront of fan awareness all season long.

## *Why Millions Cheer Each Year for College Football*

As much as I prefer the NFL, I have to acknowledge that for many fans, college football is the game to watch. The level of play isn't as high in college, but the collegiate game has more history and pageantry. Marching bands, mascots, pep rallies, and cheerleaders add a fun dimension to college football. Some teams, such as Notre Dame and Michigan, are steeped in folklore and tradition. Notre Dame, for example, has the Four Horsemen, the Seven Mules, and the Gipper.

College football fans can be every bit as passionate as NFL fans, especially when they root for a team that represents the college or university they attend or once attended or when they don't have a professional team to cheer on. Los Angeles, for example, doesn't have an NFL football team — the Rams left for St. Louis in 1995, and the Raiders returned to Oakland that same year — but its football fans make do based on the strength of two local college football teams, the USC Trojans and the UCLA Bruins. USC and UCLA consistently field excellent teams.

## What Makes the Super Bowl Number One

Almost every year, the highest-rated show on network television is the Super Bowl, with whatever the number-two show is running a distant second. Of the ten most-watched shows in the history of television, four of them are Super Bowl games. Clearly, the Super Bowl has become an event that all of America, both casual and hard-core fans alike, focuses on. Even if it's the only game they watch all season, people tune into the Super Bowl and attend Super Bowl parties in massive numbers (would you believe these parties are more popular than New Year's Eve parties?).

The Super Bowl has also become an international event. More than 200 countries and territories, including Slovenia and the People's Republic of China, televised 2014's Super Bowl XLVIII. In the United States, an estimated 112.2 million fans watched the game, making it the most watched show in the history of American television. People all over the world saw the Seattle Seahawks defeat the Denver Broncos on that Super Bowl Sunday.



The main reason the Super Bowl is so popular is that pro football is the only major professional team sport with a single-elimination playoff system. The other major sports declare their champions after a team wins four games in a best-of-seven series. The Super Bowl is do-or-die; that's what makes the game so special.

And it isn't just the game itself that attracts viewers. Companies pay advertising firms lots of money to create commercials. In fact, watching the Super Bowl to see the commercials has become a part of what makes Super Bowl Sunday so special. All the commercials are judged and summarized because hundreds of millions of potential customers are watching, making the commercial stakes almost as high as those on the field.



### The road to the Super Bowl

I played in my only Super Bowl after my third season in the NFL, and I thought I'd make it back at least two or three more times during my career. Unfortunately, that never happened.

The media attention back in 1984 wasn't nearly as expansive as it is today. In fact, tracing the growth of the media from 1984 to today is like comparing the size of Rhode Island to the

size of Montana. I remember taking a cab to Tampa Stadium to play in the Super Bowl. The traffic was so bad that I ended up walking the last three-quarters of a mile to the stadium. Today, the NFL provides police escorts for the players. The fanfare surrounding a team's arrival is as if the president is coming to town.

## Chapter 2

# Meet Me on the Gridiron

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Comparing domes and outdoor stadiums
- ▶ Taking a look at the field and the ball
- ▶ Getting a rundown of the many players
- ▶ Gearing up for football with uniforms, helmets, pads, and shoes

I've spent a lot of time on football fields. Although the dimensions are the same, from high school to the NFL, every field seems different. That's because all across America, the atmosphere inside each stadium, or the architectural character of the stadium itself, tends to be unique to that region. But every field shares some common characteristics.

In this chapter, I explain the basics of a football field and why teams don't always play on my favorite surface — good old green grass. I also talk about the number of players on the field, what they wear, and that odd-shaped ball they play with.

## *The Big Picture: Stadiums*

As you probably know, a *stadium* is the whole structure or area in which football and other games are played: the field, the stands, and so on. Stadiums come in all shapes and sizes. The important thing is that they allow room for the 100-yard-long football field, which is, of course, obligatory. (See the next section for more on the football field.)

NFL and college stadiums come in two main varieties: domed stadiums and outdoor stadiums. Domed stadiums are designed so that the players and the fans don't have to deal with the weather; they always have a roof over their heads, and the teams always play on artificial turf. When you're talking about big-time football, both types of stadiums generally seat between 50,000 and 107,000 screaming fans.

## The best stadium in pro football

There's no better setting in pro football than Lambeau Field in Green Bay, Wisconsin. With its circular seating and lack of an upper deck, Lambeau is a fan-friendly stadium. Every seat offers a good view of the action.

For a potentially cold arena, Lambeau is also a player-friendly stadium. To improve their field in freezing conditions, the Packers installed SportGrass in 1997. This new surface consists

of natural grass planted on a recyclable, synthetic surface below field level. This setup creates a stable base that can't be destroyed by the physical wear and tear on the field when coupled with soggy, wet conditions. The old field, by the way, was packed into "Frozen Tundra" boxes and sold to fans to help pay for the new field.

New stadiums, many financed through public support and tax dollars, have become one of the NFL's top priorities. Between 1992 and 2010, a total of 22 new stadiums were built. These stadiums offer luxury boxes, state-of-the-art video systems, and other amenities for fans. Reliant Stadium, home of the Houston Texans, boasts natural grass and a retractable roof, the first of its kind in the NFL. Ford Field, the home of the Detroit Lions, includes a six-story atrium. In 2010, proving once and for all that Texans like all things big, the Dallas Cowboys inaugurated Cowboys Stadium, the largest domed stadium in the world. The stadium includes an 11,520-square-foot video display screen, the — you guessed it — largest high-definition screen in the world.

## *Getting Down to Business: The Field*

There's nothing like a football field. If I could wish something for everyone, it would be for them to stand on the sideline at an NFL game and hear, sense, and feel the impact of the collisions and see the speed of the game up close. The selected areas around the sidelines for photographers and television cameramen are my favorite places to watch the game. The following sections tell you what you see on a football field, whether you're on the field or in the stands.

### *Field dimensions*

The dimensions of a football field haven't changed much through the years. The field has been 100 yards long and  $53\frac{1}{3}$  yards wide since 1881. In 1912,

the two end zones were established at 10 yards deep and have remained so ever since. Consequently, all football games are played on a rectangular field that's 360 feet long and 160 feet wide.

## *The marks on the field*

All over the field, you see a bunch of white lines. Every line has a special meaning, as shown in Figure 2-1:

- ✓ **End lines:** The lines at each end of the field are called the *end lines*.
- ✓ **Sidelines:** The lines along each side of the field are called the *sidelines*.
- ✓ **Goal lines:** The *goal lines* are 10 yards inside and parallel to each end line.
- ✓ **Field of play:** The area bounded by the goal lines and sidelines is known as the *field of play*.
- ✓ **50-yard line:** The field is divided in half by the *50-yard line*, which is located in the middle of the field.
- ✓ **End zones:** The two areas bounded by the goal lines, end lines, and sidelines are known as the *end zones*.

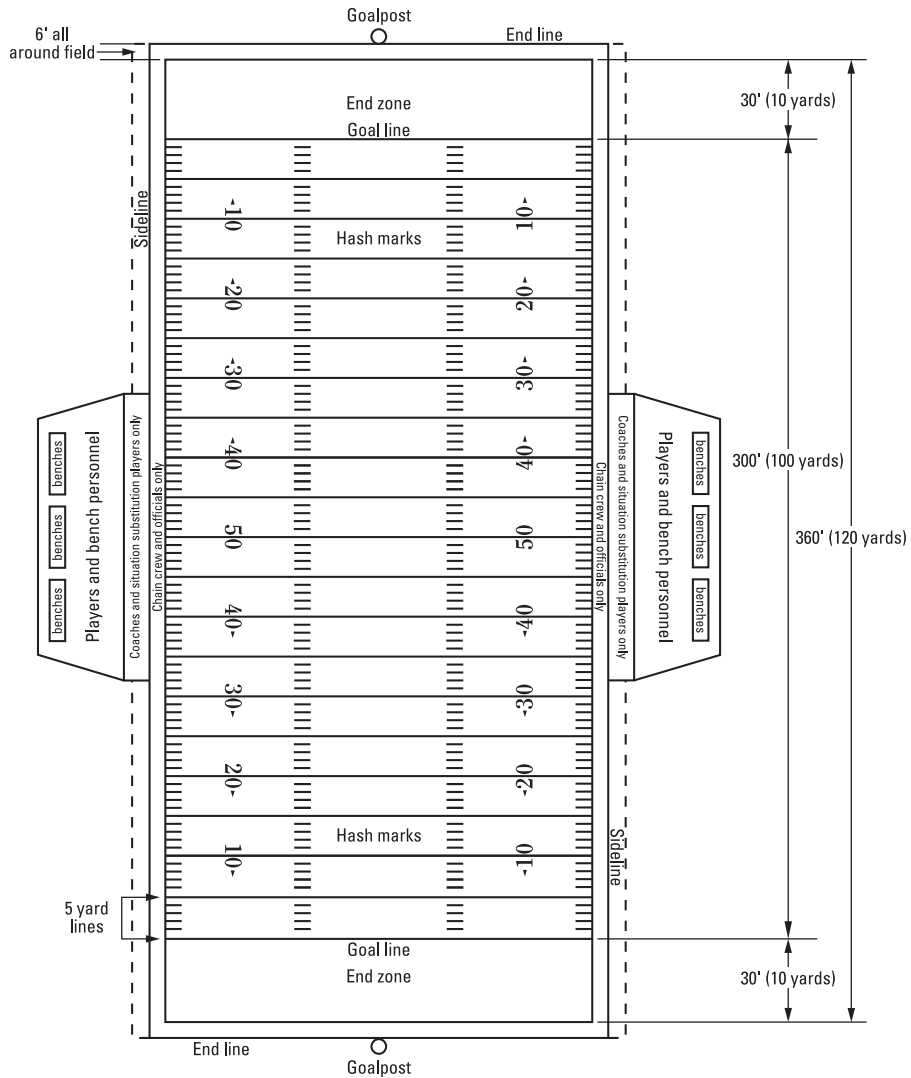
To make all these white lines, teams use paint or marking chalk. They're even painting grass fields these days. The end lines and sidelines are 4 inches wide and rimmed by a solid white border that's a minimum of 6 feet wide. All boundary lines, goal lines, and marked yard lines are continuous lines until they intersect with one another.

The field also contains yard lines, hash marks, and lines marking the player benches, which I describe in detail in the following sections.

### *Yard lines*

*Yard lines*, at intervals of 5 yards, run parallel to the goal lines and are marked across the field from sideline to sideline. These lines stop 8 inches short of the 6-foot solid border in the NFL.

Yard lines give players and fans an idea of how far a team must advance the ball in order to record a *first down*. As Chapter 3 explains in detail, an offensive team must gain 10 yards in order to post a first down. Consequently, the field is numbered every 10 yards, starting from the goal lines. All these lines and numbers are white.



**Figure 2-1:**  
The playing field.

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### Hash marks

Hash marks mark each yard line 70 feet, 9 inches from the sidelines in the NFL. On high school and college football fields, the hash marks are only 60 feet from the sidelines. Two sets of hash marks (each hash is 1 yard in length) run parallel to each other down the length of the field and are approximately 18½ feet apart. When the ball carrier is either tackled or pushed out of bounds, the officials return the ball in bounds to the closest hash mark. Punted balls that go out of bounds are also marked on the nearest hash mark.

## When you've gone too far

A player is *out of bounds* whenever he steps from the field of play and touches (or flies over) the white sidelines or end lines. To remain in bounds for a catch, an NFL player must have both feet (including the toes of his shoes)

touching the ground inside the end lines and sidelines and must be in possession of the football; in college and high school football, a player needs to have only one foot inside the end lines and sidelines to be considered in bounds.

The hash marks are used for ball placement prior to most offensive plays so more of the game can be played in the middle of the field, which makes the game more wide open. If the ball was placed 20 feet from where it went out of bounds rather than on the closest hash mark, offenses would be restricted to one open side of the field for many of their run and pass plays. In other words, they would have to run or pass to the right or the left, and wouldn't have the option to do either. But, when teams run the football and the ball carrier is tackled between the hash marks, the ball is declared dead at that spot and generally is placed where the ball carrier was tackled and stopped.



An important thing to remember is that an incomplete pass is returned to the spot of the preceding play, not where it actually goes out of bounds or where the quarterback was standing when he threw it.

### *Player benches*

Six feet outside the border of the field, or 6 feet from the sidelines, is an additional broken white line that defines an area in which only coaches and substitute players may stand. Six feet farther behind this broken white line is where the *bench area* begins (refer to Figure 2-1). The team congregates in the bench area during a game, watching teammates play or resting on the benches. Within this area, team doctors and trainers also examine injured players.

## *The playing surface*

Two types of surfaces are used in football — natural grass and artificial turf. Each has its pros and cons.

- ✓ **Natural grass:** Many natural grass surfaces exist, depending on the region's temperature and the stadium's drainage system. Generally, though, natural grass is similar to your backyard lawn or any baseball outfield: It's green, soft, and beautiful, but it needs to be mowed,

watered, and replaced. Many companies have invested a lot of time and effort into perfecting a combination of natural grasses that can withstand the heavy and destructive wear that football presents (after all, cleats can rip up turf).

- ✓ **Artificial turf:** Some artificial surfaces are made from synthetic nylon fibers that resemble very short blades of grass; other artificial surfaces have tightly woven fibers that give the feel of a cushioned carpet. Artificial surfaces are cheaper to maintain than natural grass. Plus, many football stadiums are multipurpose facilities that are used for outdoor concerts, political and religious rallies, and other sports, such as baseball and soccer. When such events are held, some areas of the grass can become trampled and destroyed by the thousands of fans sitting or walking on it, so having an artificial surface is advantageous.

Then again, in many stadiums, the artificial surface is also harder than natural grass because it's often laid over cement, blacktop, or dirt. And on extremely hot days, artificial surfaces retain the heat, making a day that's 95 degrees Fahrenheit feel like a 100-degree day.

Most players prefer natural grass to artificial turf. Playing on an artificial surface is much like playing on green-colored wall-to-wall carpeting.



## Grass beats artificial surfaces

I never liked playing on artificial surfaces. The problem with these surfaces, in my opinion, is that your shoes get stuck, which makes you more susceptible to injury. The game is faster on this surface, but when players make quick cuts or attempt to move too quickly, they seem to twist their knees and feet because their shoes stick to the surface.

I never could find the right shoe for artificial surfaces. I even tried basketball sneakers. I think I tried on maybe a thousand different styles of nub-tipped shoes. I tried everything on turf, and I retired never being satisfied with any of the shoes.

Players also suffer what I call *turf burns* when they dive to make a tackle or when a ball carrier

skids across the surface. I've had the skin on my elbows and knees rip right off me. Some teams use what doctors give burn victims — it's called *second skin*. A thin, jellylike material, second skin can be cut to size and placed on the turf burn. The problem with any turf burn is that it can last for two to three weeks, and even if you don't play on turf again, the scab gets ripped off every day in practice.

To prevent these types of injuries, a lot of players wear elastic sleeves over their elbows, forearms, and knees. I tried playing with them, but they kept slipping down after I started sweating. I didn't like having to pull them up or back on for every play — it was an unnecessary, useless activity.