



American Football



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About the Tutorial

American Football popularly known as the Rugby Football or Gridiron originated in United States resembling a union of Rugby and soccer; played in between two teams with each team of eleven players. American football gained fame as the people wanted to detach themselves from the English influence.

The information here is meant to supplement your knowledge on the sport. However, it is not a comprehensive guide on how to play the sport.

Audience

This tutorial is meant for those who want to get a basic overview on American Football. It is prepared keeping in mind that the reader is unaware about the basics of the sport. It is a basic guide to help a beginner understand the sport.

Prerequisites

Before proceeding with this tutorial, you are required to have a passion for the sport and an eagerness to acquire knowledge on the same.

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1. American Football – Overview

American Football popularly known as the **Rugby Football** or **Gridiron** originated in United States resembling a union of Rugby and soccer; played in between two teams with each team of eleven players. American football gained fame as the people wanted to detach themselves from the English influence. The father of this sport **Walter Camp** altered the shape and size of the ball to an oval-shaped ball called ovoid ball and drawn up some unique set of rules.



Objective

American Football is played on a four sided ground with goalposts at each end. The two opposing teams are named as the **Offense** and the **Defense**. The offensive team with control of the ovoid ball, tries to go ahead down the field by running and passing the ball, while the defensive team without control of the ball, targets to stop the offensive team's advance and tries to take control of the ball for themselves.

The main objective of the sport is scoring maximum number of goals by moving forward with the ball into the opposite team's end line for a touchdown or kicking the ball through the challenger's goalposts which is counted as a goal and the team gets points for the goal. The team with the most points at the end of a game wins.



Team Size

American football is played in between two teams and each team consists of eleven players on the field and four players as substitutes with total of fifteen players in each team. It is played in both men's and women's category.

2. American Football – Participating Countries

Many other western sports like baseball, rugby, soccer and Formula 1 Racing are being successful in branching to other nations and have gained hype in the international markets. American football has struggled in this regard and was more of American than any other sport. Just recently the game is gaining action worldwide with different championship league matches, out of which the most popular being the National Football League (NFL). There are two important federations viz European Federation of American Football (EFAF) and International Federation of American Football (IFAF).

Countries Participating in American Football

Around 40 countries are currently participating in this sport listed below alphabetically:

American Football Participating Countries	Championship Leagues
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Australian Gridiron League• Down Under Bowl
Austria	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• IFAF World Championship• EFAF European Championship
Bahamas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bahamas Bowl
Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Belgian Football League (BFL)• The Belgian Bowl• Flemish American Football League (FAFL)
Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Carioca Bowl (beach American football league)• Torneio Touchdown Tournament
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Amateur Gridiron Football League• Bills Toronto Series• International Bowl
China	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• China American Football League
Cuba	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bacardi Bowl
Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• National Ligaen
Egypt	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Egyptian League of American football
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vaahtera Liiga season
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ligue Élite de Football Américain (LEFA)
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• German Football League (GFL)
Iceland	
India	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elite Football League of India (EFLI)

Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irish American Football League (IAFL) • Shamrock Bowl
Israel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Israeli Football League
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Italian Football League (IFL) • Spaghetti Bowl
Japan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atomic Bowl • Koshien Bowl • Rice Bowl
Luxembourg	
Mexico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organización Nacional Estudiantil de Fútbol Americano (ONEFA) • Global Kilimanjaro Bowl
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AFBN Division One • Tulip Bowl • Roots indoor American football tournament
New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital Bowl • Haka Bowl • American Football Wellington
Norway	
Pakistan	
Philippines	
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polish American Football League • Polish Bowl
Portugal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liga Portuguesa de Futebol Americano (LPFA)
Puerto Rico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ArenaCup Championship
Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campionatul Național de Fotbal American (CNFA)
Russia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russian American Football Championship
Serbia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serbian National League
South Korea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kimchi Bowl
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spain's American Football Cup • Liga Nacional de Fútbol Americano (LNFA)
Sri Lanka	
Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superserien
Switzerland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nationalliga A • Non Professional Swiss Romande American Football League (NSFL) • Swiss Bowl

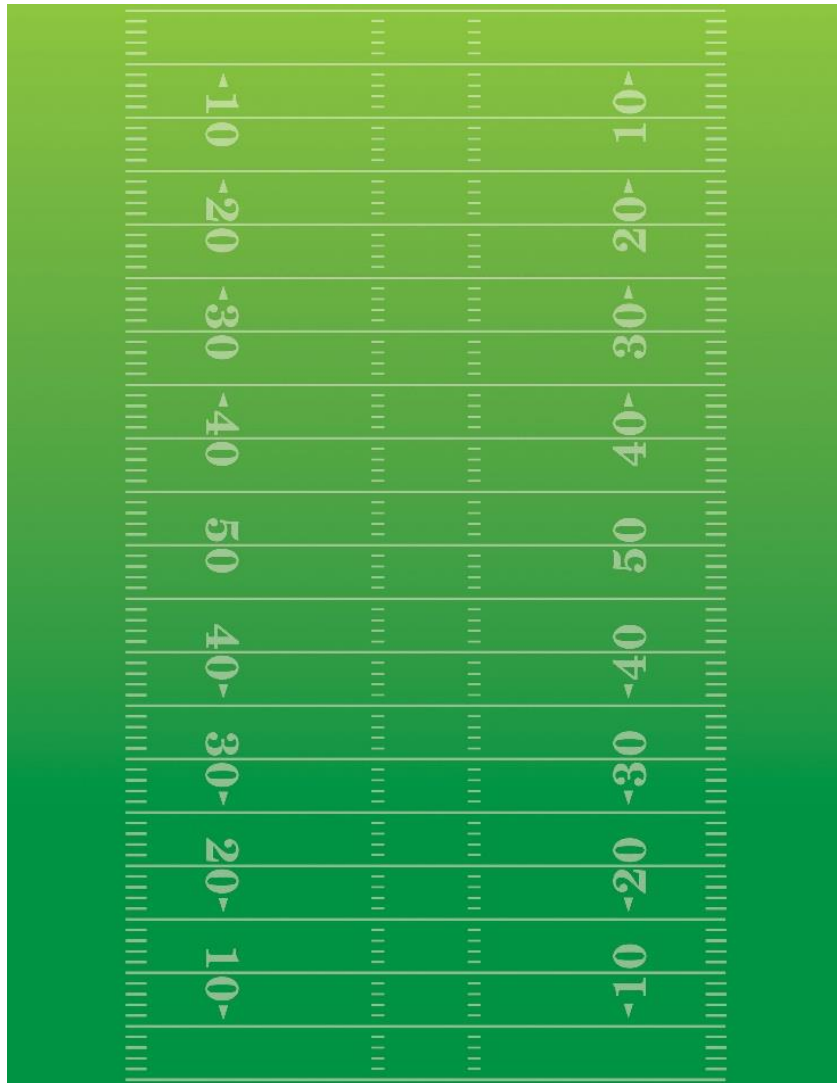
Turkey	
United Kingdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • British American Football League (BAFL) • British Gridiron Football League (BGFL) • British Collegiate American Football League • Capital League • BritBowl
United States of America (USA)	
United States of America	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Football League (NFL) • Super Bowl • United Football League (UFL) • Ohio League • Anthracite League • Regional Football League (RFL) • World Series of Football • American Football Women's League (AFWL) • American Indoor Football League • Arena Football League (AFL) • Champions Indoor Football (CIF) • Continental Indoor Football League (CIFL) • Champions Professional Indoor Football League (CPIFL) • Indoor Football League • Legends Football League (LFL) • Lone Star Football League (LSFL) • National Indoor Football League • Professional Indoor Football League (PIFL) • Southern Indoor Football League (SIFL) • Supreme Indoor Football • Ultimate Indoor Football League (UIFL) • United Indoor Football • X-League Indoor Football (X-League) • All American Football League • Mid Continental Football League • Minor League Football Association • North American Soccer Football League • United National Gridiron League (UNGL) • World Football League • Stars Football League (SFL)

3. American Football – Playing Environment

American football, rightly known as the game of collision, is a battle of the teams for more points aiming for the win of their respective territories and the field predominantly serves as a way to measure the momentum of this sport. The game is played on large fields similar to that of Rugby and Soccer.

American Football Field Design

The rectangular green field measures 360 feet long by 160 feet wide and has end zones at each end. Based on the NFL rulebook, 30-foot deep scoring end zones, horizontal lines drawn every five yards, with yard lines numbered in multiples of 10 positioned accurately twelve yards in from the side-lines. All lines and field markings are painted in white on green grass. The slingshot goalpost measuring 10 feet which was redesigned and relocated in the late 90's, is now placed at the back of the end zone as shown in the below layout:



The two vertical lines in the centre of field are known as the **line of scrimmage**, the offensive & defensive teams with 11 players take the possession of the ovoid ball at their line of scrimmage. The line marked with 50 is the centre of the field and that is where the ball is first placed before the start of the match. The players position themselves in their own yard spaces to start the game.

Timing of the Game

American football is played for 1 hour with four 15-minute quarters, divided by a 12-minute break at halftime. With 2-minute breaks at the finish of the first and third quarters, and the teams change ends of the field after every quarter of the game. But at the end of the first and third quarters, the team retaining the ball would be heading into the following quarter. The second half of the game starts with a kick off similar to the beginning of the game in the first quarter.

Both the teams have 40 seconds after the end of a play and they must snap of the ball for the start of the next play. The team which is not successful in snapping the ball gets penalized. The game clock stops at the end of every incomplete passing plays, or a player goes out of boundary, or when a penalty is called. The clock starts again when the ball is re-spotted by the match referee.

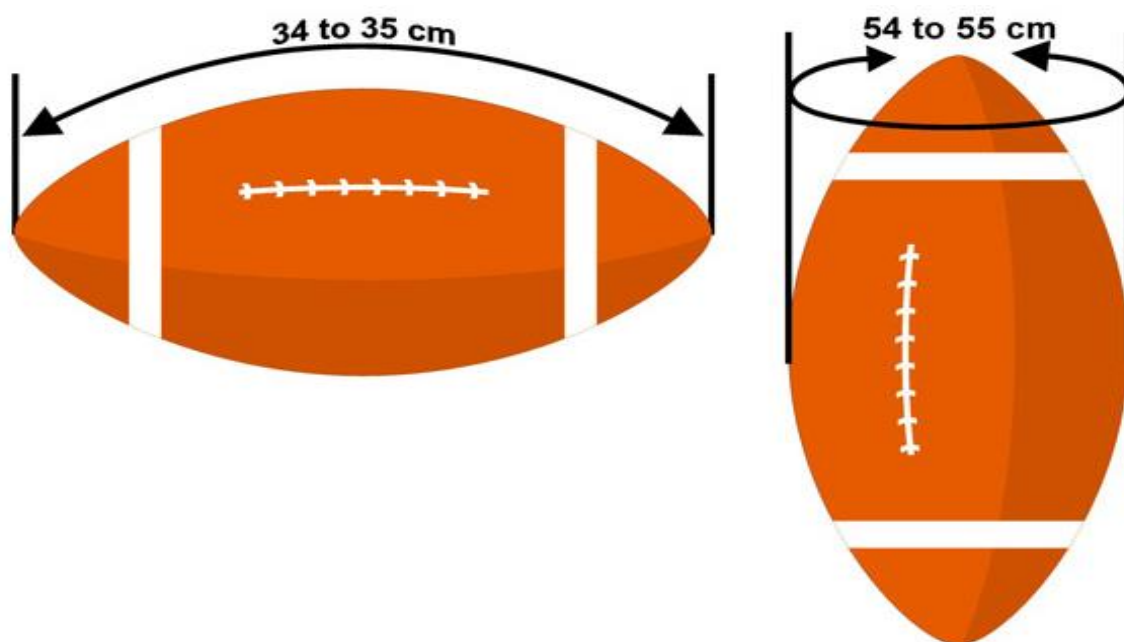
In a tie game scenario, 15-minute overtime is given for the play and the team that first scores a point wins. A coin toss is made to determine the ball possession for the overtime.

4. American Football – Equipment

Primarily, to have an American football match, the basic equipment required is the American football called the **Ovoid ball**.

Ovoid ball – The ball used for the play is an egg-shaped brown coloured ball called the Ovoid ball. It is 11 inches or 35 centimetres in length from tip to tip and 22 inches or 55 centimetres in circumference at the centre of the ball. The ball weighs about 450gms and inflated to a pressure of 0.6 to 1.1 atmospheres.

Apart from the ball the players need to put on some protective equipment to compete in the game.



Helmet – Comprises of jaw pads, an integrated face mask, chin strap, mouth guard and particular shock absorbents to reduce the force of impacts of the ball.

Shoulder Pads – A key equipment with hard outer made of plastic and shock absorbing foam inside, gives the players a broad-shouldered look.

Arm Pads – Light and flexible arm pads help the players to be bruise free

Elbow Pads – Protect and deforms the impact with its skin-tight webbing.

Rib pads – Absorb and distribute the shock through the rib pad specially designed to normalize players body temperatures and protects against injuries.

Hip & tailbone pads – Are put into the pouches of the belt worn under the pants.

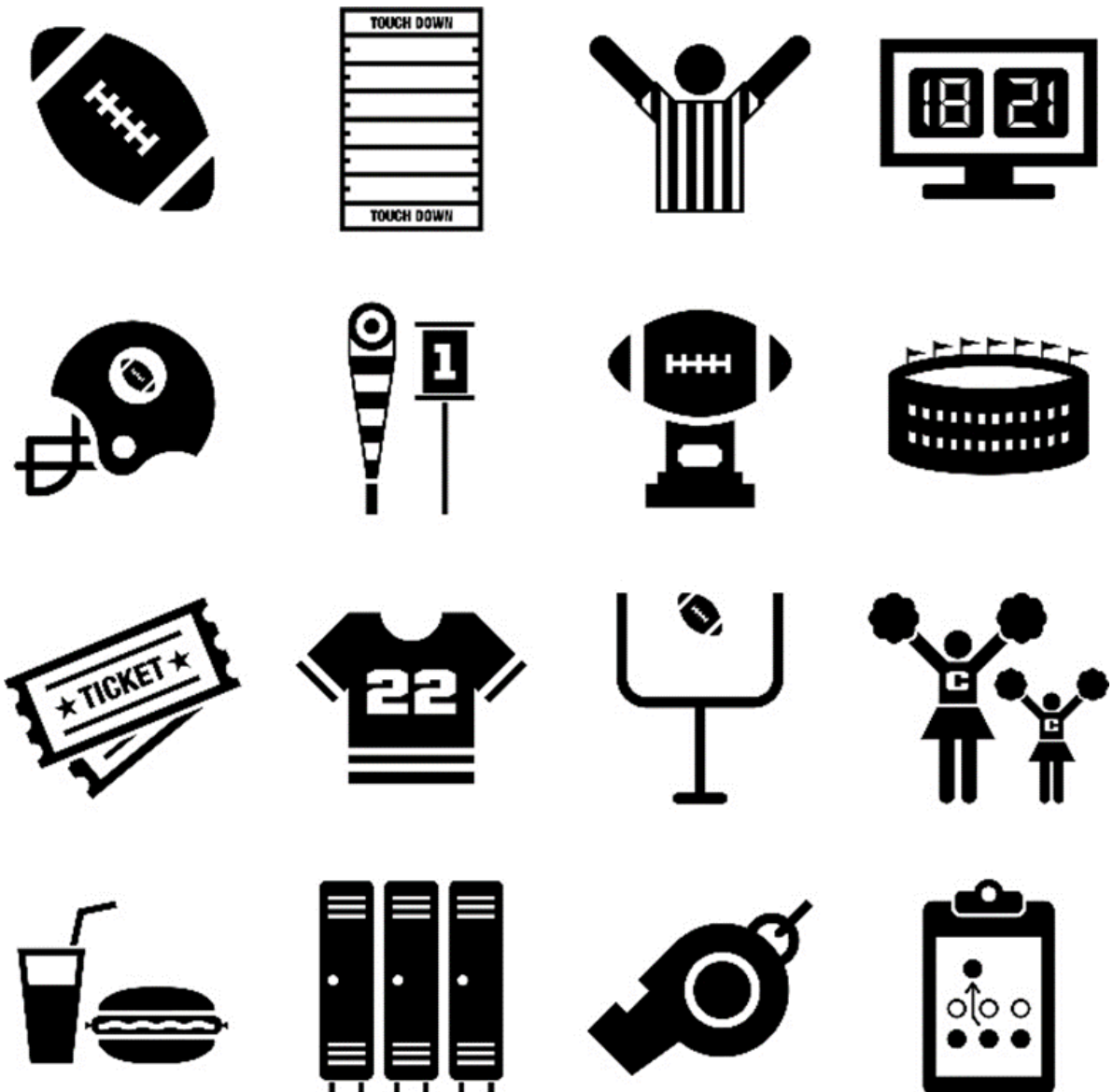
Thigh & knee Pads – Quilted pads made of plastic and foam and are put into the pockets stitched inside the pants

Gloves – Hand gloves are not mandatory for the players but the thick padding linen helps to protect fingers and hands.

Cleats (footgear) – Players need perfect sole footwear with spikes called “cleats” below the sole designed specifically for games on the grass.

Jersey – A nylon material loose coloured shirt with coloured side panels are worn by all the players. Usually the players name and number are mentioned by his team colour.

Pants – A nylon mesh coloured pant with four individual pockets on the inner side of the pant to hold thigh & knee pads. Hip and tailbone pads with a safety belt to secure the pads is also provided.



5. Terms in American Football

Before knowing the game rules and playing guidelines, it's very important to get familiarized with the terms used in the game.

- **Tee** – a cone shaped platform which holds the ball
- **Yard Space** – Space gained by the player to measure the progress of the game
- **Line of Scrimmage** – The lines parallel to goal line and next to each team's end, the two lines are termed as the offensive & defensive line of scrimmage.
- **Offense** – Team with the control of the ball
- **Defence** – Team opposing the offense, without the possession of the ball
- **Center** – Player in the offense, with the control of the ball
- **Tackle player** – Position of the players on both offense and defence lines.
- **Tight end** – Position of offensive team player also called as the **Y** receiver, placed next to the offensive tackle.
- **Wide Receiver** – Position of offensive team player 7 yards away from the formation
- **Quarterback** – Position of offensive player right behind the centre
- **Halfback** – Position of offensive player behind the wide receiver near to the goal line.
- **Fullback** – Position of offensive player placed behind the quarterback in forming a T shape structure.
- **End player** – Position of defensive player placed on the defensive line of scrimmage exactly opposing the centre.
- **Nose tackle** – Position of the defensive player opposing the centre, effective in stopping the running and rushing the pass.
- **Linebacker** – Position of defensive player placed right behind the end players
- **Cornerback** – Position of defensive player positioned behind the linebackers to disrupt the passing.
- **Safeties** – Position of defensive player behind the linebacker ready to take control of the ball from the offense.
- **Dead ball** – The ball not anymore in the play
- **Kickoff** – The ball is placed on a tee at the defence's 35-yard line, and a special kicker also kicks the ball to the offense.

- **Placekick** – It is a style of kicking the ball when put on the tee.
- **Drop kick** – When the ball is being dropped to the ground and is being kicked before it hits the ground again
- **Free kick** – It is a kicking form to place the ball in the play.
- **Down** – Time period in which the individual plays in a certain duration, outside of which the ball is dead or not in play
- **First Down** – When the offensive team effectively passes and moves the ball 10 or more yards, they earn a first down
- **Run** – A player advancing the ball gaining the necessary yard space
- **Pass** – A player passes the control of the ball to other player of the same team.
- **Forward pass** – A player passing the ball, might touch an object, a person, or the ground nearer to the other team's end line or is unintentionally lost in a forward throwing motion.
- **Tackle** – When the player holding the ball whose knee touches the ground the play comes to an end with tackle
- **Touchdown** – It is a scoring system worth 6 points ideally when a player carries the ball and touches the opponent's end zone
- **Point after touchdown (PAT)** – After the touchdown the team will try for an extra 1 or 2 points by kicking the ball through the goal post or throwing it to the end zone.
- **Field Goal** – Worth of 3 points occurs if the ball is place kicked, drop kicked or free kicked in between the goal posts in the opponent's end zone.
- **Safety** – Scoring system worth of 2 points occurs by making the player possessing the ball out of his own end zone and out of bounds, or driving the other team to fumble the ball to exit the end zone. A safety is also presented if the offensive team does a foul in its own end zone.
- **Turnover** – Happens when one team loses the ball the other team gains.
- **Fumble** – Occurs when the player drops the ball by chance
- **Interception** – Takes place when a player regains the ownership of the ball from an opposing player.

6. American Football – How to Play?

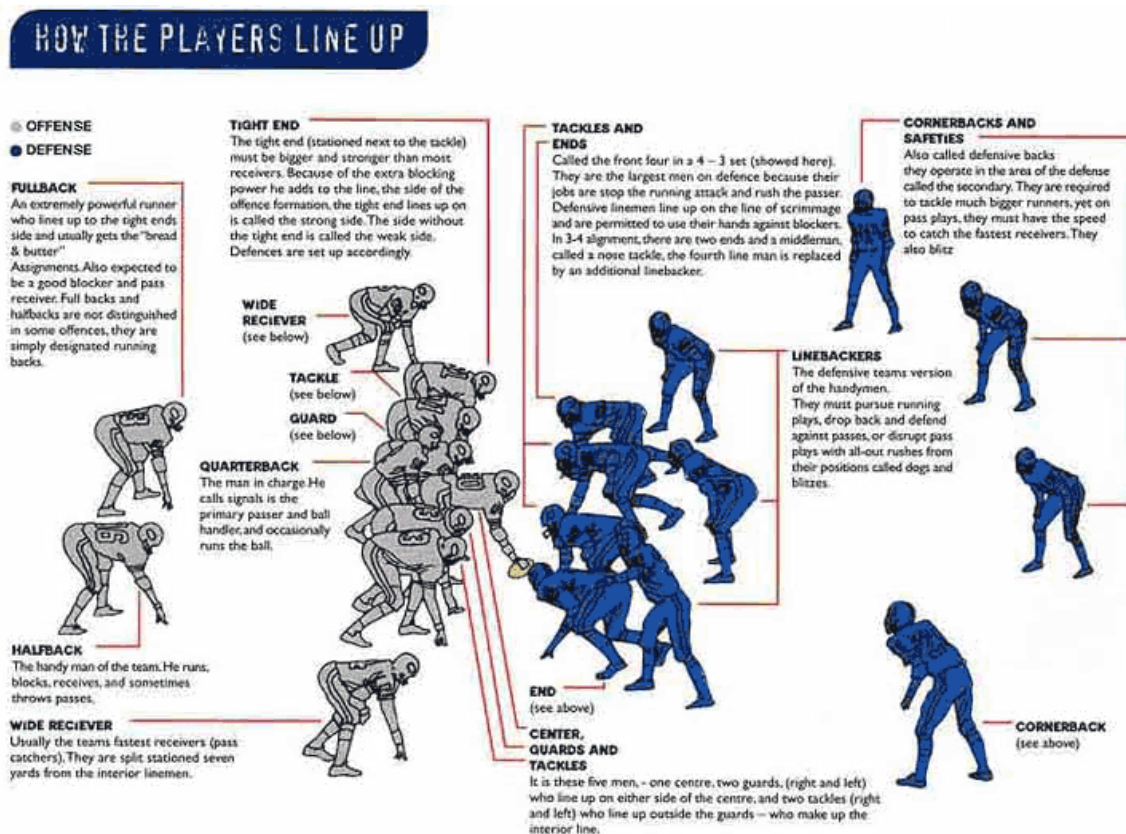
Getting Ready

American Football starts with the toss of a coin, just 3 minutes before the game. The referee meets both team captains and calls for a toss. The winner of the toss has can choose from either receiving the kickoff or just kickoff to start the game. Apart from that the winning team chooses an end of the field and the loser of the toss other end of the field.

Players & their Positioning

Each team is divided in three different units

- **The Offense**, the players who have the possession of the ball indicated in the picture below as the grey team
- **The Defense**, the other team players who line up to stop the offense indicated in the picture below as the blue team.
- **Special teams**, the team that takes care of free kicks, kickoff, and field goal attempts along with the punts. Only 11 players are on the field from each team at any point of time.



The offense team lines up the field on the line of scrimmage, with **1 center** player having the control of the ball, **2 guard players** on both right and left side of the centre player, **2 tackle players** positioned outside of the guard players on both sides. A **quarterback** player standing right behind the centre player is the primary passer and ball handler. A **tight end player** is lined up on the left side of the centre player slightly behind the tackle players. He is the powerful player who has extra blocking control.

There are **2 wide receiver players** stationed 7 yards away from the centre player on both strong and weak sides, who will receive the ball and are fastest in passing the ball. A **halfback** player placed behind the wide receiver players runs, blocks, receives, and passes the ball. An important player who is extremely powerful runner, excellent blocker and good passer is positioned in the **fullback** on the strong side.

The defence team lines up on the defence line of scrimmage, exactly opposing the offense team, with **2 tackle and 2 end players** blocking the centre player of the offense, being the strongest are known as front four. The front four players battles head-to-head against the offense. Their main aim is to stop the running attack, rush the passer and take control of the ball. They are even permitted to use their hands against the offense.

A **nose tackle player** positioned as the middleman to help the defence line players. There are 3 **linebackers** stationed exactly behind the tackle and end players. They are the most handy men with their main objective to pursue running, play, drop back, defending against the passes, and disrupting the pass plays. Two **cornerback** players, also known as defensive backs, are placed a little behind the linebackers in the area of defence called secondary area. These players are required to tackle fast runners in the plays and interrupt the passing. They also have commendable speed to strike down the wide receivers of the offense. The last two players called the **safeties** will try to take the control of the ball from the offense.

Quick Glimpse of the Game

The **offensive team** with 11 players takes possession of the ovoid ball and tries to advance the ball by throwing and running to the opponent team's goal post to score points. Both the teams try to gain points by crossing the goal line and getting into the end zone. The opponent team called **the defence** tries to stop the offensive team and takes the control over the ball. Out of both the teams, the team with the ball has to score more points or the team is forced to give up the possession of the ball. The offensive and defensive teams change roles (the offensive team goes on defence and the defensive team goes on offense). The same continues back and forth, until all four 15 minute quarters of the game have been played.

The game starts with the **kickoff**. The ovoid ball is placed on a tee (a cone shaped platform which holds the ball) at the defence's 35-yard line, and a special kicker also known as a **placekicker** kicks the ball to the offense. Any player from offense team will try to catch the ball and advance to the defence. When a kickoff is caught in the offense's end zone, the kicker has two options to play. First option is to run the ball away from the end zone and second option is to kneel down in the end zone to gesture a touchback and to stop the play immediately. The ball is positioned on the 20-yard line and game is started again.

The offensive team tries to get as much space as it can to try and move closer to the defence's end zone. Every time the offense gets hold of the ball and has four downs or chances to gain 10 yards. If the offensive team effectively passes and moves the ball 10 or more yards, they earn a first down and similarly other set of four downs. If the offense fails to gain 10 yards space then they lose control of the ball. The defence tries

to prevent the offense from scoring and gaining the 10 yards needed for first down. If the offense reaches fourth down then they end up punting the ball (kicks it away). This makes the defence team to begin its game from further down the field.

One of the important game rules of American Football is the **play from scrimmage**. It is the movement of the game during which one team tries to advance the ball, get a first down, or a point, and the other team tries to stop them or take the ball away. These plays from scrimmage include—field goal attempts (from either a place kick or a drop kick), passing the ball, retaining the ball and running, punting the ball (dropping the ball from the hands and then before it reaches the ground, kicking the ball), or **freekicks** such as kick-offs and fair catch kicks. The game also consists of a series of **downs**, referred to as a time period in which the individual plays in a certain duration, outside of which the ball is dead or not in play.

Replacement of players can be made only between the downs, which allows for a great deal of choice for the team to send in the best suitable player for that particular situation.

Moving the Ball – The Run and the Pass

Usually the game begins with the snap of the ball at the line of scrimmage. The quarterback of the offense calls out a play in code and the centre player passes or snaps the ball under his legs. The quarterback then continues from there and takes a quick decision on either to throw the ball or run with it.

The offense can advance the ball in two ways. First one is **The Run** and this happens when the quarterback player passes the ball off to a running back player, who attempts to gain as many yards as possible by escaping the defensive players. The quarterback is also one of the runners and is permitted to run with the ball.

Another alternative to taking the ball is to **Pass** it. The quarterback player generally passes the ball to trick the defence. Any other player from the offensive team can also pass the ball as long as the pass is thrown from behind the line of scrimmage. A pass is complete after another offensive player catches the ball, typically the wide receiver or tight end player of the catch the ball. If the ball smashes the ground before any other player catches it, then it's an incomplete pass.

The defence players stop the offense from progressing with the ball by getting the ball to the ground. A player is said to be **Tackled** when the players knees touch the ground. This results in end of the play. A play also finishes in case if the player runs out of boundaries.

Scoring

The game is played on a point based scoring system. The main objective of the players is to score points and team with scoring highest number of points is declared winner of the game. According to the scoring structure points can be scored in four methods that is Touchdown, Extra point (PAT), Field goal, and Safety points.

A **Touchdown** is achieved when a player carries the ball and crosses the opponent team's end zone. The player who is successful in advancing the ball or otherwise gains control of the ball by catching it in the end zone is qualified as a touchdown. If a forward pass was thrown on the play, the quarterback is also credited with a passing touchdown. It is the biggest single score in the whole game worth six points, and it allows the scoring team an opportunity to attempt to get an extra point.



Following a Touchdown the ball is spotted at the opponent's two-yard line, the offense has two possibilities. Either the offense will try for an extra point called the **Point After Touchdown (PAT)** conversion or the offense magnificently kicks the ball through the goal post to earn one point. Two extra points can also be scored by running or throwing the ball into the end zone similar to a touchdown.

A **Field Goal** can be recorded by the team if the ball is place kicked, drop kicked or free kicked in between the goal posts in the opponent's end zone. With field goal a team is worth of three points and often are the determining points in the climax of the game. These goals can be tried from anywhere on the field on any down, but mostly are kicked from inside the defence's fourth down position. If a field goal is missed, the ball is kept back on the original line of scrimmage or on the 20-yard line if ball goes further from the goal line and the control of the ball goes to the other team. Place kick is the best way to make a perfect field goal. The defence attempts to block the offense from making a field goal and stop the ball from reaching the goal post.

The **Safety** is worth two points. A safety rises if the player grounds the ball making it a dead ball in his own end zone. In that case two points are awarded for safety to the opponent team. A safety is also granted to the team if the other team commits a foul in its own end zone.

A **Turnover** happens when the team is trying to advance the ball to the end zone and by chance loses the possession of the ball without kicking it.

A **Fumble** occurs when the ball mover or passer drops the ball, any player can recover the ball by leaping on it or he can run with it. The team that recovers a fumble gets the control of the ball. A violent defence can regain the ownership of the ball by intercepting (catching) passes than an **Interception** takes place. The fumble recoveries and interceptions can advance up to the end zone to score a touchdown.

7. American Football – Champions

The roots of American Football hail from United States of America, being quite obvious the American teams and players are the best performing teams worldwide. As per the International Federation of American Football (IFAF) ranking of the participating countries is listed as follows:

Ranking	Country	Teams	Champions
1 st	USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New England Patriots• Green Bay Packers• Miami Dolphins• Pittsburgh Steelers• San Francisco 49ers• Dallas Cowboys• Denver Broncos• Seattle Seahawks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jon Morris• Brett Favre• Aaron Rodgers• Jason Taylor• Ben Roethlisberger (Big Ben)• Roger Staubach• Tim Tebow
2 nd	Japan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Japan National American Football team• Obic Seagulls	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Noriaki Kinoshita• Tetsuo Takata• Ryota Takahashi
3 rd	Mexico	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mexico national American football team• Pumas CU• Autentico Tigres	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Isaias Vega• Isaias Arroyo• San Roman
4 th	France	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• France national American football team• Amiens Spartiates• Elancourt Templiers• Thonon Black Panthers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Marc Soumah• Samyr Hamoudi• Paul Durand• Kevin Mwamba
5 th	Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Australia national American Football team• Gridiron Queensland• Gridiron New South Wales• Gridiron Tasmania	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jared Stegman• Damien Donaldson• Carlisle Jones

American Football Scenario in India

American football has been more widespread as just an American sport. In India this sport has been known by very few of them, young Indians have never grown up playing this game. The league matches of this sport are hardly being broadcasted on Indian television channels hence nowhere is this sport more ardently prevalent than it is in the United States.

In the year 2012 the first season of Elite Football league of India (EFLI), the American football league, has kicked off. It was very new and the third game anyone on the field had ever played. Yet this was an experimental football league having players who have never played the game professionally and the viewers who have never indeed watched

it. The EFLI arranged five teams in Indian metropolitans, one in Pakistan and two in Sri Lanka to increase the awareness and viewership of the game.

Indian Teams are as follows:

