

FOOTBALL TERMS

Audible: Verbal commands shouted by the quarterback to his teammates at the line of scrimmage to change a play on short notice.

Backfield: the area behind the line of scrimmage

Backs: the running backs; the halfback and the full back

Ball carrier: any player who has possession of the ball

Beat: when a player gets past an opponent trying to block or tackle him.

Blitz: a play where the defensive team sends players rushing towards the line of scrimmage as soon as the ball is snapped to try to sack the quarterback.

Blocking: the act of preventing a defensive player from getting to the ball carrier; blockers use their arms and bodies but may not hold an opponent.

Bomb: a long pass thrown to a receiver sprinting down the field.

bump-and-run: a technique used by pass defenders, where they hit a receiver once within 5 yards (1 yard in college) of the line of scrimmage to slow him down, and then follow him to prevent him from catching a pass.

Call a play: instruct players to execute a pre-planned play.

Clipping: blocking an opponent below the waist from behind; this illegal block is a personal foul, punishable by a 15-yard penalty.

Complete pass: a forward pass to a teammate who catches it in the air.

Controlling the game clock: the use of tactics by an offensive team to either save or use up time on the game clock, which often dictates its choice of plays.

Cover or coverage: preventing a player from gaining yards; in pass coverage, a defender follows a receiver to prevent him from catching a pass; in kick coverage, members of the kicking team try to prevent a long kick return.

Cut back: a sudden change in direction taken by a to make it more difficult for defenders to follow and tackle him.

Dead ball: a ball becomes dead when a play is over and becomes live as soon as it is snapped for the next play.

Double coverage: when 2 defensive players cover one receiver.

down: one of 4 chances a team on offense has to gain 10 yards; also, the state of a player who has just been tackled; also, a ball that a player touches to the ground in the end zone to get a touchback.

Down the field: in the direction of the opponent's goal line.

Draft choice: a player chosen by a professional sports team from a pool of college players in an annual draft.

Drive: the series of plays a team puts together in an attempt to score.

Drop back: when a quarterback, after taking the snap, takes a few steps backward into an area called the pocket to get ready to pass.

eligible receiver: a player allowed by the rules to catch a forward pass; all offensive players are eligible except linemen and the quarterback, who must notify the referee if they wish to become eligible and stand at least one yard behind the line of scrimmage before the snap.

Encroachment: if a player (besides the center) is in the neutral zone and contact occurs prior to the snap; a foul punishable by a 5-yard penalty.

End line: the boundary line that runs the width of the field along each end.

end zone: the area between the end line and goal line bounded by the sidelines, which a team on offense tries to enter to score a touchdown.

Extra point(s): additional point(s) scored by a team after it has scored a touchdown, either by a point-after-touchdown (1 point) or a 2-point conversion (2 points).

Fair catch: when a kick returner decides only to catch a *punt* or *kickoff* and not advance it, protecting himself from being hit by an opponent; he signals for a fair catch by raising one hand in the air and waving it.

Field goal: a *place kick* that passes above the crossbar and between the uprights of the *goalpost*, earning the team that kicked it 3 points.

field position: the location of a team on the field relative to the two *goal lines*; good field position for a team is near its opponent's goal line, while bad field position is close to its own goal line.

First down: the first chance out of 4 that a team on offense has to advance 10 yards *down the field*; as soon as it gains those yards, it earns a new first down.

Forward pass: a pass thrown by a team closer to the opponent's *goal line*; a team is allowed to throw only one forward pass per play, and it must be thrown from behind the team's *line of scrimmage*.

Forward progress: the location to which a *ball carrier* has advanced the ball, even if he was pushed backwards after getting there.

Foul: a violation of football's rules by a team or player, punishable by a penalty.

fumble: when a *ball carrier* loses *possession* by dropping the ball or having it knocked away before a play ends; the first player to regain possession of the *loose ball* is said to make the *recovery*, and his team becomes the offense.

goal line: a line drawn across the width of the field, 10 yards inside each *end line*, which a team must cross with the ball to score a *touchdown*.

goalpost: a tall metallic structure that stands at the back of each *end zone*; consists of a crossbar and two uprights that extend upward from it, supported directly above the end line by a base; teams try to kick the ball above the crossbar and between the uprights to score a *field goal* or *extra point*.

Going for it: when a team facing a fourth down decides to try for a new *first down* instead of *punting*; if it fails, it loses *possession* of the ball.

Hand-off: a running play where the *quarterback* hands the ball to a *back*.

Hang time: the length of time a *punt* is in the air.

Heisman Trophy: an award presented annually by the Downtown Athletic Club of New York to the best college football player in the country.

holding: a *foul* where a player impedes the movement of an opponent by grasping or hooking any part of his body or uniform; punishable by a penalty — 10 yards if against the offense, 5 yards (10 yards in college) plus a *first down* if against the defense.

Home field advantage: the benefit a team gets by playing games in the area where it is based, due to fan support, familiarity with its surroundings and the lack of required travel.

Home game: a game played in a team's own stadium.

In bounds: the region of the field inside the *sidelines* and *end lines*.

Incomplete pass: a *forward pass* that touches the ground before being caught.

intentional grounding: a *foul* called against a *quarterback* who purposely throws an *incomplete forward pass* solely to avoid a *sack*; cannot be called if the pass lands at or beyond the *line of scrimmage*.

Interception: a pass caught in the air (picked off) by a defender whose team immediately gains *possession* of the ball and becomes the offense.

kickoff: when a player kicks a ball from a tee at his own 30-yard line (35 in college) to the opposing team, whose player tries to advance it the other way; used to start the game, the second half and overtime, and to restart play after each score.

lateral: a pass thrown to a teammate backwards from the team's *line of scrimmage* or parallel to it; unlike a *forward pass* (which can be thrown only once per play), players may lateral the ball as often as they want.

Line of scrimmage: an imaginary line which no player may cross before the snap; each team has its own line of scrimmage, separated by the neutral zone.

Lineman: a player who starts each play within 1 yard of his line of scrimmage.

Live ball: a ball becomes live as soon as it is snapped or free kicked (as in a kickoff); opposite of a dead ball.

Loose ball: a ball that is not in possession of either team, such as after a fumble or a kickoff; it can be recovered by either team.

man-in-motion: a single player on the offense who is permitted to move prior to the snap; he may only run parallel to the line of scrimmage or away from it.

Midfield: the 50-yard line, which divides the length of the field in half.

Necessary line: the imaginary line the offense must cross to achieve a new first down.

Neutral zone: the region that contains the ball as it sits on the ground before each play; the area between the two lines of scrimmage.

NFL (National Football League): the major professional football league in the U.S. with 32 teams; its headquarters are in New York.

Nickel defense: when a defense brings in a 5th defensive back to replace a linebacker on the field, increasing its pass coverage.

Offending team: the team that committed a foul.

Offside: when any part of a player's body is beyond his line of scrimmage when the

On downs: the term used to describe a team's loss of possession if it fails to reach the necessary line on a fourth down play.

Open receiver: a player who has no defender closely covering him.

out of bounds: the region of the field touching or outside the sidelines and end lines; as soon as a ball carrier or the ball itself touches out of bounds, the play is over.

Pass defender: a defensive player who covers an opposing receiver.

Pass patterns or pass routes: pre-determined paths receivers follow to help the passer quickly locate them so he can more easily get them the ball.

Pass protection: blocking by offensive players to keep defenders away from the quarterback on passing plays.

Pass rush: a surge by defenders to get past blockers and sack the quarterback.

Personal foul: a foul that might cause injury; punishable by a 15-yard penalty.

Picked off: intercepted.

Pitch-out: a lateral tossed from a quarterback to a running back.

Place kick: a kick towards the goalpost for a field goal or extra point; held between the ground and another player's finger.

Play: a spurt of action that begins with a snap and ends with a dead ball.

play clock: a clock displayed above each end zone that limits the time teams may take between plays to 40 seconds (30 in college); the ball must be snapped before the clock runs down to 0.

Play-action pass: a passing play after the quarterback has faked a hand-off.

Playoffs: the post-season tournament that determines the NFL champion.

Pocket: the area behind the offensive line, where the quarterback is protected by his blockers.

Point-after-touchdown (PAT): a place kick taken from the opponent's 2-yard line (3-yard line in college); awarded to a team that has scored a touchdown, it is worth 1 point if it goes through the goalpost.

Possession: to be holding or in control of the football.

Previous spot: Where the ball was snapped to begin the last play.

Punt: when a player 10 yards behind the center catches a snap, drops it and kicks it before it hits the ground; an opponent tries to catch and advance it the other way.

Pylon: a short orange marker at each of the end zone's 4 corners.

quarterback: the leader of a team's offense, he takes the snap from the center and either hands the ball to a running back to run with, passes it to a receiver or runs with it himself; he also communicates each play to his teammates.

Reading the defense: recognition by the quarterback of the defensive formation; he may then call an audible to adjust the offense.

Receiver: an offensive player who catches or attempts to catch a forward pass.

Recovery: to gain or regain possession of a fumble.

Red zone: the imaginary area between the defense's 20-yard line and its goal line from which the offense is most likely to score points.

Return: an attempt by a player who has just caught an interception, punt, or kickoff to advance the ball the other way.

Roll out: when a quarterback runs parallel to the line, looking for a receiver.

Rookie: a first-year player in the NFL.

Rush: a running play; also, a pass rush.

Sack: a tackle of the quarterback behind his line of scrimmage.

safety: when a ball carrier is tackled in his own end zone after bringing the ball there under his own power; the defense earns 2 points and receives a free kick from the offense's own 20-yard line.

Scrambling: evasive movements by a quarterback to avoid being sacked.

Series: the group of 4 downs a team has to advance 10 yards.

Sideline: the boundary line that runs the length of the field along each side; a ball carrier or ball that touches or crosses the sideline is out of bounds.

Single-elimination: a tournament where a team is eliminated after one loss.

Snap: when the center while facing forward quickly hands the ball between his legs to a player standing behind him (usually the quarterback) to start each play.

Special teams: the group of players who participate in kicking plays.

Spike: when a player throws the ball at the ground to celebrate a touchdown.

Spiral: a ball passed or kicked with a spin which propels it further with more accuracy; the ball points the same direction throughout its flight.

Spot: a location on the field, determined by an official, to mark forward progress or the place of a foul.

Stiff arm (or straight arm): a push by a ball carrier to ward off a tackler.

Succeeding spot: where the next play would start if no penalty was called.

Super Bowl: the championship game of the NFL, played between the champions of the AFC and NFC at a neutral site each January; it is the culmination of the NFL playoffs.

Tackle: a player position on both the offensive and defensive lines; there is usually a left and right offensive tackle, and a left and right defensive tackle; See also tackling.

Tackling: contacting a ball carrier to cause him to touch the ground with any part of his body except his hands, thereby ending the play.

Territory: the half of the field a team protects against its opponents.

third-and-long: when the offense faces a third down and is more than a short running play away from a first down; usually third-and-5 or greater.

touchback: when a player who gains possession of a ball in his own end zone kneels to the ground and automatically starts the next play at his own 20-yard line; also awarded if his opponent kicks the ball across the end line.

Touchdown (TD): when a team crosses the opponent's goal line with the ball, catches a pass in the opponent's end zone, or recovers a loose ball in the opponent's end zone; earns a team 6 points.

Turnover: the involuntary loss of possession of the ball during a play, either by a fumble or by throwing an interception.

2-point conversion: when a team that just scored a touchdown starts a play at the opponent's 2-yard line (3-yard line in college) and crosses the goal line to earn 2 points; when successful, it looks just like a touchdown; introduced to the NFL in 1994.

Wild Card: a team that makes the NFL playoffs by having one of the 2 best records among non-division winners in its conference.

Winning percentage: the percentage of its games a team has won during a period of time, given by the following formula:

$$\text{Winning Percentage} = (\text{\#wins} + \text{\#ties}/2)/(\text{\#games played})$$