

LONDON JUNIOR MUSTANGS FOOTBALL CLUB

FOOTBALL TERMINOLOGY GUIDE



Text courtesy of Kevin Holmes, HB Sport Management Services

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STATEMENT

It has been found that, in minor football, many coaches or managers are “Dads and Moms” who just want to help out because they have a son or daughter in a minor football program and have a basic knowledge of football but are unfamiliar with football “jargon”. As well, many parents who are fans cheering on their kids from the sidelines are not quite sure what is going on during a game because they have never really watched football before. They may not understand such things as holes on the offense, gaps on the defense or even what the various positions are named.

This handbook is our attempt to assist coaches, managers, fans and parents in understanding football terminology using easy to understand language. We hope that this handbook is of use to you in developing a greater understanding of how the great game of football is played.

OFFENSE

The offensive unit takes the field after a kick-off, punt, when their defense prevents the other team's offense from gaining 10 yards (a first down) in four downs (three downs in Senior High School) or when the defense recovers a fumble or makes an interception.

POSITIONS

There are a number of different positions on offense that can be broken up into three sections; the offensive line, the backfield and the receivers.

Offensive Line

1. **Center:** The Center's job is to snap the ball (toss the ball backwards to the Quarterback through the legs) to begin the offensive play, then his job is to block the defensive players. The Center will also call his teammates to the huddle after the play is completed. The huddle is generally about 10 yards from where the official places the ball to establish the line of scrimmage. The Center is usually located in the middle of the offensive line.
2. **Guard:** There are two Guards on the offensive line. The Left Guard is generally located immediately to the left of the Center and the Right Guard is generally located immediately to the right of the Center. The Guards job is to block the defensive players once the ball is snapped.
3. **Tackle:** There are two Tackles on the offensive line. The Left Tackle is generally located immediately to the left of the Left Guard. The Right Tackle is generally located immediately to the right of the Right Guard. The Tackle's job is to block the defensive players once the ball is snapped but the Left Tackle has a bit more responsibility during a pass by the Quarterback because his job is to protect the “blindside” of the Quarterback which means ensuring the Quarterback is not hit or tackled when his back is turned as he attempts to throw a pass.
4. **Tight Ends:** Tight Ends are next to the offensive Tackles. Tight Ends are used as blockers during running plays, and either run a route or stay in to block during passing plays. There may be one or two Tight Ends on the field, depending on the offensive formation.

Backfield

1. **Quarterback:** An offensive player who lines up behind the Center, from whom he takes the snap. The Quarterback calls the offensive plays in the huddle and can make adjustments to the play once he sees how the defense is lined up.
2. **Fullback:** An offensive player who generally is located a few yards behind the Quarterback but his spot in the backfield may vary depending on the offensive play. The Fullback has more blocking responsibilities in comparison to other Runningbacks.
3. **Tailback or Halfback:** An offensive player who is the deepest Runningback when the offensive formation includes a Fullback. This position is called a Tailback in the I-Formation and a Halfback in other formations.
4. **Singleback:** An offensive player who is the only Runningback in the backfield.
5. **Splitback:** An offensive player used in the Veer formation.

6. **Wingback:** An offensive player who is the third Runningback in the backfield when the backfield already includes a Fullback and a Halfback.

Receivers

1. **Split End:** An offensive player who lines up on the line of scrimmage about 10 yards outside the offensive line. The Split End is also called the "X" Wide Receiver.
2. **Slotback:** An offensive player who lines up off the line of scrimmage but between the Flanker or Split End and the offensive line. The Slotback is also called the "Y" Wide Receiver.
3. **Flanker:** An offensive player who lines up behind the line of scrimmage about 10 yards outside the offensive line. The Flanker is also called the "Z" Wide Receiver.

NUMBERING/LETTER SYSTEM

The backfield players in an offense all have numbers assigned to them while the receivers have letters. This allows Offensive Coordinators to develop a Playbook that his players can understand. The following numbering system is used in most minor football programs:

1. Quarterback
2. Fullback, a Singleback if only one Runningback in the backfield or the Left Splitback in the Veer formation
3. Tailback in an I-Formation, Halfback in other formations or the Right Splitback in the Veer formation.
4. Wingback
- X. Split End
- Y. Slotback
- Z. Flanker

If the Runningbacks line-up as receivers (a spread formation), they would keep their numbers and not revert to letters.

FORMATIONS

There are far too many different types of offensive formations to list them all but the following formations are quite common in minor football:

1. **I-Formation:** A formation that includes a Fullback and Tailback lined up directly behind the Quarterback while the Quarterback is under the Center. By definition, the Fullback lines up in front of the Tailback. Four variations on this backfield formation exist:
 - a. Strong/Near I-formation is when the Fullback is set to the strong side of the formation relative to the Quarterback and Tailback.
 - b. Weak/Far I-formation is when the Fullback is set to the weak side of the formation relative to the Quarterback and Tailback.
 - c. Stacked I-formation is where a Wingback is stacked behind the Tailback, usually at a depth of 7 yards or greater from the line of scrimmage.
 - d. Offset Stacked I-formation is where the Wingback is on the near or far side of the formation, but still behind the Fullback. This is often incorrectly referred to as a "Full-House Backfield".
2. **Single Wing T:** A formation with one Wingback and an adjoining Tight End in which the Center hands the ball to the Quarterback, who holds his hands between the legs of the Center.
3. **Double Wing:** A formation with two Tight Ends and two Wingbacks in which the snap is tossed by the Center between his legs to the Quarterback or Halfback moderately deep in the backfield.
4. **Double Winged T:** A formation with two Tight Ends and two Wingbacks in which the Center hands the ball to the Quarterback, who holds his hands between the legs of the Center.
5. **Flexbone:** A formation involving three running backs where a Fullback is lined up behind the Quarterback and a Halfback and Slotback are lined up behind the line of scrimmage at both ends of the offensive line.
6. **Jumbo:** An offensive package which includes two Tight Ends, a Fullback and a Halfback. Similar to heavy jumbo, in which either the Halfback or the Fullback is replaced by another Tight End. Usually used when the offense needs short yardage to gain a first down or the offense is near the opposing team's goal line.

7. **One Back:** A formation where the offensive team has one Runningback (Singleback) in the backfield with the Quarterback. Other eligible Wide Receivers are near the line of scrimmage.
8. **Pistol:** A hybrid version of the shotgun in which the Quarterback lines up about three yards behind the Center and the Singleback lines up directly behind the Quarterback.
9. **Shotgun:** A formation in which the offensive team may line up at the start of a play. In this formation, the Quarterback receives the snap 5-8 yards behind the Center.
10. **Spread:** A formation where the offense has four or five Wide Receivers spread across the field with an empty backfield or only a backfield containing a Singleback prior to the snap. This formation forces the defense to also spread out and makes defensive coverage difficult. Primarily used for passing.
11. **Trips:** A formation in which three Wide Receivers are lined up on the same side of the field, with one on the line of scrimmage and usually the others flanking the Wide Receiver, one yard off the line of scrimmage (as in Slot or Wing, though only one yard away from the Wide Receiver), each way.
12. **Veer:** A type of option offense using two Runningbacks in the backfield, one behind each Offensive Guard or Offensive Tackle (referred to as Splitbacks), allowing a triple option play (give to either Splitback or Quarterback keep).
13. **West Coast:** An offensive philosophy that uses short, high-percentage passes as the core of a ball-control offense. The basis of the offense is to use short routes for receivers, delivering the ball on time and accurately and using short passes to replace runs. It relies heavily on RAC yardage, using many eligible receivers on plays to maximize Quarterback options, and spreading the ball to many targets to keep the defense confused.
14. **Wildcat:** An offensive philosophy that dictates that either a Quarterback or a Runningback can receive a direct snap from the snapper.
15. **Wishbone:** A formation involving three Runningbacks lined up behind the Quarterback in the shape of a Y, similar to the shape of a wishbone.

HOLES

A Hole is the space between the Offensive Linemen. The Holes start out at zero on either side of the Center and are odd numbered to the left of the Center and even numbered to the right. Thus, immediately to the left of the Center the Hole is 1, followed by 3, then 5 and so on. Hole 7 would be to the left of the Tight End and 9 would be to the wide left.

PASSING TREE

The "Passing Tree" describes a series of routes that a Wide Receiver can run to get open so he can be in position to catch the football. In offensive plays that include a pass, these routes are known as the passing tree.

DEFENSE

The defensive unit takes the field anytime the opposing team's offense has the ball. It is the job of the defense to stop the opposing team's offense from scoring points. This can be accomplished a number of ways; preventing the offense from getting a first down and forcing them to punt, recover a fumble or make an interception.

POSITIONS

There are a number of different positions on defense that can be broken up into three sections; the Defensive Line, Linebackers and Defensive Backs.

Defensive Line:

1. **Tackle:** A player position on defense on the inside of the defensive line and which principal function is to stop the run. In a four or five man defensive line, there are two Defensive Tackles,

Left Tackle and Right Tackle. The Tackles would generally be responsible for stopping runs through the A, B or C Gaps, depending on the defensive alignment being used.

2. **Nose Tackle:** A Tackle in a 3-man defensive line who lines up "opposite the Center's nose" and between the Defensive Ends. Contrary to a regular Defensive Tackle, a Nose Tackle is often much larger and considered the 'anchor' of the line, effective at disrupting blocking schemes and stopping runs through the A Gaps.
3. **End:** A player position on defense who lines up on the outside of the Defensive Tackles and which the principal function is to put pressure on the Quarterback. There are two Defensive Ends on the defensive line, Left End and Right End. Along with putting pressure on the Quarterback, they could be responsible for runs through the C Gap or containment through the D Gaps.

Linebackers:

1. **Outside Linebacker:** There are two Outside Linebackers (Left and Right) who typically play 1 to 6 yards behind the Defensive Linemen and are the most versatile players on the field because they can defend both run and pass defense or called to blitz. The Outside Linebacker must defend against the run through the B and C Gaps or containment through the D Gap and also be able to cover the Tight End if the Tight End runs a pass route. In a 3-4 formation, an Outside Linebacker may be designated as a "Rush Linebacker", rushing the passer on almost every play.
2. **Inside Linebacker:** There may be one or two Inside Linebackers on the field at a time, depending on the defensive formation. If there is one Inside Linebacker, that player is a Middle Linebacker. If there are two Inside Linebackers, they are called Inside Linebackers (Strong and Weak Sides). The Inside Linebackers must protect against the run through the A, B or C Gaps and be able to blitz if called upon.

Defensive Backs:

1. **Cornerback:** A player position on defense who lines up outside of the Defensive Halfback or the Outside Linebacker, near the line of scrimmage across from a Wide Receiver. There are two Cornerbacks on the field at a time, Left Cornerback and Right Cornerback. Their primary job is to disrupt passing routes and to defend against short and medium passes in the passing game, and to contain the Ball Carrier on rushing plays, preventing the Ball Carrier from getting to the outside of the defense.
2. **Defensive Halfbacks:** A player position on defense who lines up between the Cornerback and Outside Linebacker, near the line of scrimmage and across from a Wide Receiver or a Slotback. Their primary job is to defend against short and medium passes in the passing game. The number of Defensive Halfbacks on the field at a time may range from 0 to 6, depending on the defensive formation.
3. **Free Safety:** A player on defense who typically play deep, or "center field", and often has the pass defense responsibility of assisting other Defensive Backs in deep coverage.
4. **Strong Safety:** A player on defense who has responsibility for both run and pass support, slightly favour run support. Strong Safeties also have the added responsibility of directing the secondary in relation to the play that is being called by the offensive team. It should also be noted that the Strong Safety would position himself on the Strong Side of the field.
 - i. Note: In a single Safety formation, the Safety would play in the middle of the field but may cheat a little bit to the Strong Side. It should also be noted that the Strong Safety would position himself on the Strong Side of the field.

NAMING SYSTEM

The Linebackers have different names, depending on their position on the field:

1. **SAM:** This is the Outside Linebacker who plays on the Strong Side of the field.
2. **MIKE:** This is the Middle Linebacker in a three Linebacker set or the Strong Side Inside Linebacker in a four Linebacker Set.
3. **MACK:** This is the Weak Side Inside Linebacker in a four Linebacker set.
4. **WILL:** This is the Outside Linebacker who plays on the Weak Side of the field.

STRONG SIDE/WEAK SIDE

The defensive unit breaks the field into two sections depending on how the offense is lined up; the strong side and the weak side. This enables the defensive players to align themselves properly to provide the correct coverage at the right time.

1. **Strong Side:** There are a number of ways to define the Strong Side. The easiest way to define the Strong Side is that if the Quarterback is right handed, the left side of the opposing team's defense is the Strong Side. If the Quarterback is left handed, the right side of the defense is the Strong Side. Other definitions include: The side of the field (left or right) that has the most offensive players, but it depends on the formations of the teams. When a team uses one Tight End, the strong side is the side of the field where the Tight End lines up. If the offensive package uses no Tight End, or more than one Tight End, the strong side is the side of the field with the most offensive players on or just behind the line of scrimmage.
 - If the offense runs a balanced line with an equal number of players on each side of the Offensive Line, the Strong Side is the widest part of the field from where the ball is on the line of scrimmage to the sidelines.
 - If the offense runs a balanced line and the ball is situated in the middle of the field. The Strong Side is the left side of the defense
2. **Weak Side:** There are a number of ways to define the Weak Side. The easiest way to define the Weak Side is that if the Quarterback is right handed, the right side of the defense is the Weak Side. If the Quarterback is left handed, the left side of the defense is the Weak Side. Other definitions include; When one Tight End by the offense is used, the side of the field opposite the Tight End is the Weak Side. In other offensive packages, the side of the field with the fewest offensive players on or just behind the line of scrimmage is the Weak Side
 - If the offense runs a balanced line with an equal number of players on each side of the Offensive Line, the Weak Side is the shortest part of the field from where the ball is on the line of scrimmage to the sidelines.
 - If the offense runs a balanced line and the ball is situated in the middle of the field, the Weak Side is the right side of the defense.

GAPS

When the offense is in a standard formation, defensive gaps start at the Center and work their way out in both directions. The space between the Center and Guards is the "A Gap" on both sides. The space between the Guards and Tackles is the "B Gap" on both sides. The space between the Tackles and Tight Ends is the "C Gap" on both sides. Outside of the Tight End is the "D Gap". Gaps move as the play develops. For example; if the Tight End moves to the outside, the "C Gap" would expand.

FORMATIONS

The base defense that is most commonly used in minor and high school football is the 4-3 defense:

4-3 DEFENSE

This is a defensive formation with 4 Linemen, 3 Linebackers, 2 Defensive Halfbacks, 2 Cornerbacks and one Safety. Several variations of this formation can be employed by Defensive Coordinators such as 4 Linemen, 3 Linebackers, 1 Defensive Halfback and 2 Safeties.

OTHER FORMATIONS

Other defensive formations that you may see during the game, based on a team's personnel, are the following:

- **2-4-6 DEFENSE**
 - A type of Nickel formation with 2 Linemen; 2 Defensive Ends or 1 Defensive End and 1 Defensive Tackle, 4 Linebackers; 2 Outside Linebackers and 2 Inside Linebackers, and 6 Defensive Backs; 2 Cornerbacks, 2 Defensive Halfbacks, 1 Free Safety and 1 Strong Safety.
 - This formation is more common among teams with 3-4 base defenses than the 3-3-6, because all four starting Linebackers remain on the field while the Defensive Linemen -- the slowest players on the defense -- come out. This maximizes versatility for the defense against 3 or even 4 Wide Receiver offensive sets. A Safety will often cover the

fourth Wide Receiver, and a Linebacker will cover the Tight End or Halfback, leaving four to patrol the middle of the field. The 2-4-6 is most often used against the 2 minute offense, when substituting players may be difficult.

- **3-3-6 DEFENSE**

- A variation of the Nickel formation with 3 Linemen; 2 Defensive Ends and 1 Defensive Tackle, 3 Linebackers; 2 Outside Linebackers and 1 Middle Linebacker, and 6 Defensive Backs; 2 Cornerbacks, 2 Defensive Halfbacks, 1 Strong Safety and 1 Free Safety. Often called a 3-3 stack, this formation is also called the "Rule Breaker" due to the fact that it often changes blocking schemes for the offensive line.

- **3-4 DEFENSE**

- A defensive formation with 3 Defensive Linemen; 1 Nose Tackle and 2 Defensive Ends, 4 Linebackers; 2 Outside Linebackers and 2 Inside Linebackers, 2 Cornerbacks, 1 Defensive Halfback and 2 Safeties. In this formation, an Outside Linebacker may be designated as a "Rush Linebacker", rushing the passer on almost every play.

- **4-4-4 DEFENSE**

- A defensive formation with 4 Defensive Linemen; 2 Defensive Tackles and 2 Defensive Ends, 4 Linebackers; 2 Outside Linebackers and 2 Inside Linebackers and 4 Defensive Halfbacks; 2 Cornerbacks and 2 Safeties.

- **4-6 DEFENSE**

- (pronounced *forty-six defense*) A variation of the 4-3 defense, this formation consists of 4 Defensive Linemen; 2 Defensive Tackles and 2 Defensive Ends, 3 Linebackers; 2 Outside Linebackers and a Middle Linebacker with 3 Defensive Backs crowding the line of scrimmage; 2 Cornerbacks and the Strong Safety. The remaining Free Safety and a Defensive Halfback stay in the secondary.

- **50 DEFENSE**

- A once popular college defense with 5 Defensive Linemen and 2 Linebackers. Also known as the "Oklahoma Defense," it is structurally very similar to the 3-4. In the 50-defense, the team uses a Nose Tackle, 2 Defensive Tackles lined up over or slightly inside the Offensive Tackles, 2 Defensive Ends lining over or outside the Tight End, 2 Outside Linebackers, 2 Cornerbacks, 2 Defensive Halfbacks and 1 Safety. It maximizes size along the line of scrimmage and is mostly used only against teams that run the ball a lot.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The units that handle kickoffs, punts, free kicks and field goal attempts. Although Special Teams are often manned by second and third team players, Special Teams can often win a game for their team by establishing field positions on kick-offs and punts, making field goals when needed and sometimes returning a kick-off or a punt all the way for a touchdown. In today's game, more and more coaches are spending additional practice time on Special Teams because they recognize the importance that this area of football has on the outcome of many games.

There are numerous positions on Special teams:

1. **Kicker:** Player who specializes in placekicking (i.e. field goals, extra points and kick offs). The Kicker is the last man back who has an opportunity to tackle the Kick Returner and prevent a touchdown if the Kick Returner has avoided all the tacklers on the kicking team.
2. **Punter:** A kicker who specializes in punting as opposed to place kicking. The Punter is the last man back who has an opportunity to tackle the Punt Returner and prevent a touchdown if the Punt Returner has avoided all the tacklers on the punting team.
3. **Kick Returner:** A player on the receiving team who specializes in fielding kicks and running them back.
4. **Punt Returner:** A player on the receiving team who specializes in fielding punts and running them back.

5. **Gunner:** Players on the Kick-off team who have great speed and whose job is to go directly to the ball and either tackle the Kick Returner or recover the ball. Usually Special Teams will have 3 designated Gunners on the kick-off team.
 - a) A Gunner is also the widest player on the line of scrimmage in a punting formation. The gunner in a punt formation is often one of the fastest players on the team, usually a Cornerback or Wide Receiver.
6. **Place Holder:** A player is in a kneeling position in front of the Kicker during field goals and extra point. The Place Holder catches the ball when the Center snaps it and places it in a position for the Kicker to kick the ball through the uprights.
7. **Lane Runner:** If a player is not a Gunner or the Kicker on the Kicking Team, the player is a Lane Runner and will be responsible for a lane which means he runs straight down the field, then curls in when he gets close to the Kick Returner. This prevents the Kick Returner from running into open space and a possible touchdown.

SCORING

There are lots of different ways to score points in a football game including:

- **Touchdown (6 Points):** A play worth six points, accomplished by gaining legal possession of the ball in the opponent's end zone or by the ball crossing the plane of the opponent's goal line with legal possession by a player.
- **Convert (1 Point):** An untimed down awarded to a team that has just scored a touchdown. The scoring team receives possession on the opponent's 5 yard line. A place kick or drop kick through the uprights is worth 1 point. Also called an Extra Point.
- **2 Point Conversion (2 Points):** Instead of kicking the convert after a touchdown, a team may attempt to pass or run the ball into the end zone. If successful, the team is awarded two points.
- **Field Goal (3 Points):** A score of 3 points made by place- or drop-kicking the ball through the opponent's goal other than via a kickoff or free kick following a safety; A missed field goal can be returned, if recovered in-bounds by the defending team. If the Field Goal is missed and the opposing team does not run the ball out of the end zone, the team kicking the field goal receives a single point.
- **Safety (2 Points):** A method of scoring by downing an opposing Ball Carrier in his own end zone, forcing the opposing Ball Carrier out of his own end zone and out of bounds, forcing the offensive team to fumble the ball so that it exits the end zone or blocking an opposing team's punt and the ball is downed in the end zone. A Safety is also awarded if the offensive team commits a foul within its own end zone. After a Safety, the scoring team may elect to have the ball put into play as follows: (a) By scrimmaging the ball at its own 35-yard line (b) By kicking off from its own 35 yard line (c) By requiring the team scored against to kick off from its own 35-yard line.
- **Rouge (1 Point):** Applied only in Canadian Rules Football - The Kicking Team scores a single point when the ball is punted, drop kicked, or place kicked into the receiving team's end zone (without scoring a field goal or hitting the goal post) and the receiving team fails to run or kick the ball back into the field of play. The single also is scored if the kick goes out of bounds in the end zone, except on a kickoff. On a kickoff, the single is scored only if the ball stays inbounds and is not run out of the zone, or if the defense puts the ball out of bounds in the end zone.

GAME OFFICIALS

There are numerous Officials involved during a game to ensure that all the rules are followed by the players. It should be noted that all of these Officials may not be on the field during a minor football game but, if a full complement of Officials were in attendance, they would include:

- **Referee:** The Referee (R) is responsible for the general supervision of the game and has the final authority on all rulings. Thus, this position is sometimes referred to as Head Referee and is considered to be the crew chief. He can be easily identified by his differently colored cap. The Referee could wear a black cap while the other officials wear white caps or the Referee wears a white cap with black piping while the other officials wear black caps with white piping.
 - During each play from scrimmage, the Referee positions himself behind the offensive team, favouring the right side (if the Quarterback is a right-handed passer). He also counts offensive players.
 - On passing plays, he primarily focuses on the Quarterback and defenders approaching him. The Referee rules on possible roughing the passer and, if the Quarterback loses the ball, determines whether it is a fumble or an incomplete pass.
 - On running plays, the Referee observes the Quarterback during and after he hands off the ball to the Runningback, remaining with him until the action has cleared just in case it is really a play action pass or some other trick passing play. Afterwards, the Referee then checks the Runningback and the contact behind him.
 - During punts and field goals, the Referee observes the Kicker (and holder) and any contact made by defenders approaching them.
 - The Referee announces penalties and the numbers of the players committing them, and clarifies complex and/or unusual ruling to both fans and the teams' benches.
 - Finally, the Referee also carries a coin in order to conduct the pregame (and if necessary, overtime) coin toss.
- **Umpire:** The Umpire (U) stands behind the Defensive Line and Linebackers, observing the blocks by the Offensive Line and defenders trying to ward off those blocks — looking for holding or illegal blocks. Prior to the snap, he counts all offensive players.
 - During passing plays, he moves forward toward the line of scrimmage as the play develops in order to; (1) penalize any Offensive Linemen who move illegally downfield before the pass is thrown or (2) penalize the Quarterback for throwing the ball when beyond the original line of scrimmage. He also assists on ruling incomplete passes when the ball is thrown short.
 - As the Umpire is situated where much of the play's initial action occurs, he is considered by many to hold the most dangerous officiating position.
 - In addition to his on field duties, the Umpire is responsible for the legality of all of the players' equipment.
- **Head Linesman:** The Head Linesman (H or HL) stands at one end of the line of scrimmage (usually the side opposite the press box), looking for possible off-sides, encroachment and other fouls before the snap. As the play develops, he is responsible for judging the action near his sideline, including whether a player is out of bounds. During the start of passing plays, he is responsible for watching the Receivers near his sideline to a point 5-7 yards beyond the line of scrimmage.
 - He marks the forward progress of the ball and is in charge of the chain crew in regard to its duties.
 - In addition to the responsibilities listed above, the Head Linesman also carries a chain clip that is used by the chain crew in order to properly place the chains and ensure an accurate spot when measuring for a first down.
- **Line Judge:** The Line Judge (L or LJ) assists the Head Linesman at the other end of the line of scrimmage, looking for possible off-sides, encroachment and other fouls before the snap. As the play develops, he is responsible for the action near his sideline, including whether a player is out of bounds. He is also responsible for counting offensive players.
 - During the start of passing plays, he is responsible for watching the Receivers near his sideline to a point 5-7 yards beyond the line of scrimmage. Afterwards, he moves back towards the line of scrimmage, ruling if a pass is forward, a lateral, or if it is illegally thrown beyond the line of scrimmage.
 - On punts and field goal attempts, the Line Judge also determines whether the kick is made from behind the line of scrimmage.
- **Field Judge:** The Field Judge (F or FJ) works downfield behind the defensive secondary on the same sideline as the Line Judge. He makes decisions near the sideline on his side of field,

judging the action of nearby Runningbacks, Receivers and defenders. He rules on pass interference, illegal blocks downfield, and incomplete passes. He is also responsible for counting defensive players. He has sometimes also been the Official Timekeeper.

- With the back judge, he rules whether field goal attempts are successful.
- **Side Judge:** The Side Judge (S or SJ) works downfield behind the defensive secondary on the same sideline as the Head Linesman. Like the Field Judge, he makes decisions near the sideline on his side of field, judging the action of nearby Runningbacks, Receivers and defenders. He rules on pass interference, illegal blocks downfield, and incomplete passes. He also counts defensive players.
 - During field goal attempts he serves as a second umpire.
- **Back Judge:** The Back Judge (B or BJ) stands deep behind the defensive secondary in the middle of the field, judging the action of nearby Runningbacks, Receivers (primarily the Tight Ends) and nearby defenders.
 - He rules on pass interference, illegal blocks downfield, and incomplete passes. He covers the area of the field in between himself and the Umpire. He has the final say regarding the legality of kicks not made from scrimmage (kickoffs).
 - With the Field Judge, he rules whether field goal attempts are successful.
- **Chain Crew:** The Chain Crew (commonly known as the "Chain Gang") are assistants to the Referee who handle the first down measuring chain and the down indicator box. The members of the Chain Crew who operate the measuring chain are called Rod Men and the person who works the down indicator box is called the Box Man.
 - The down indicator box is a pole with a sign indicating what the current down is. Before every play from scrimmage, it is placed on the sideline to mark the current line of scrimmage.
 - The first down measuring chain is used to measure the yards that the offensive team needs to gain a first down. It is a 10-yard metal chain with poles attached to each end. The poles, usually called "the sticks", are almost always covered in bright orange padding.
 - When a team gains a first down, one of the Rod Men places one end of the chain on the sideline parallel to the spot of the ball. The other Rod Man then stretches the chain out to mark the first down line. To ensure an accurate measurement, a clip is usually attached to the chain on the closest 5-yard mark on the field.
 - The chains will be brought directly onto the field whenever the Referee needs an accurate measurement to determine if a first down has been made. A team may also request an accurate measurement to determine how far they have to reach for the first down.
- **Time Keeper:** The Time Keeper will assist the Field Judge in keeping the official time during a game. If an electronic scoreboard is available, he would start and stop time at the direction of the Referee. If an electronic scoreboard is not available, the Time Keeper would use a stop watch to keep time. The Time Keeper usually is seated up in the booth in order to clearly see the Referee signal to start or stop time.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

A

AIR RAID

An offensive philosophy derived from the West Coast Offense but adapted to the shotgun formation. In this offense the running game is heavily de-emphasized while the quick pass, medium pass, and screen game are highly developed.

ALL-PURPOSE YARDS

The sum of all yards gained by a player who is in possession of the ball during a play. This includes rushing and receiving yards gained on offense, yards gained on returns of interceptions and fumbles, and yards gained on kickoff, punt and missed field goal returns.

AUDIBLE

A play called by the Quarterback at the line of scrimmage to make a change from the play that was called in the huddle.

AUTOMATIC FIRST DOWN

For several of the most severe fouls against the defensive team, a first down is awarded to the offensive team even if the result of the penalty does not advance the ball beyond the line to gain a first down. Fouls include pass interference and all personal fouls.

B

BACK

A position behind the offensive and defensive linemen. Offensively, mostly used for running plays: Tailback, Quarterbacks, Halfback, Fullbacks, Singleback and Wingback. Defensively, generally faster players with some or all responsibility to cover receivers: Linebackers, Defensive Halfbacks, Cornerbacks and Safeties.

BACKFIELD

The area of a football field behind the line of scrimmage. The backfield or offensive backfield can also refer to members of offense who begin plays behind the line, typically including any backs on the field, such as the Quarterback, Tailback, Halfback and/or Fullback.

BACKSIDE

The side of the defense formation the offensive play runs or passes away from. .

BACKWARD PASS

A pass thrown backward. Also called an "onside pass". There is no limit to the number of backward passes or where they may be thrown from. Sometimes referred to as a "lateral," which specifically refers to a pass thrown with no motion toward either end zone.

BALL CARRIER

Any player who attempts to advance the ball during a rushing play, or any player in possession of the ball and attempting to advance it on the ground.

BALL SECURITY

The ability of a player to maintain control over the football during play and thus avoid a fumble.

BLITZ

A defensive maneuver in which one or more Linebackers or Defensive Backs, who normally remain behind the line of scrimmage, instead charge into the opponents' backfield. However, in the 3-4 defense, one Linebacker typically rushes the passer with the three down linemen. This is not considered a blitz. If an additional Linebacker is sent, bringing the total number of rushers to five, it is a blitz.

BLOCKING When a player obstructs another player's path with his body. Examples: Cut block, Zone block, Trap block, Pull block, Screen block, Pass block, Double-team block.

BLOCKING SLED

A heavy piece of practice equipment, usually a padded angular frame on metal skids, used for developing strength and blocking techniques

BOOTLEG

An offensive play predicated upon misdirection in which the Quarterback pretends to hand the ball to another player, and then carries the ball in the opposite direction of the supposed Ball Carrier with the intent of either passing or running (sometimes the Quarterback has the option of doing either). A naked bootleg is a risky variation of this play when the Quarterback has no blockers pulling out with him. Contrast with scramble, sneak, and draw.

BOX, THE

An area on the defensive side of the ball, directly opposite the Offensive Linemen and about 5 yards deep; having 8 players in the box means bringing in a Defensive Back, normally the Strong Safety, to help stop the offensive team's running game

BUBBLE SCREEN

A type of screen pass where the Quarterback takes the snap and immediately throws to a Wide Receiver lined up to the far right or left of the Center. The Wide Receiver catches the ball, and then turns to run downfield.

BUTTONHOOK (HOOK, DIG)

The buttonhook route is when a Wide Receiver runs straight upfield a certain distance and then plants hard and runs straight back towards the Quarterback. Often simply called a hook route or a dig route. In some cases, a dig route is considered a very long buttonhook, such as 15+ yards downfield. Hence the Wide Receiver must dig his cleats in hard to stop and come back at the Quarterback after running so far and fast.

C

CARRIES

A statistic referring to the number of times a rushing player attempts to advance the ball. A Ball Carrier can be any player that attempts to advance the ball during an offensive play, regardless of position.

CENTER

A player position on offense. The Center usually snaps the ball. The middle lineman is not always the snapper.

CENTER-ELIGIBLE

A trick play; at the snap, the entire Offensive Line is to one side of the Center so that he is on the end and therefore is an eligible receiver.

CHAIN

The 10-yard long chain that is used by the chain crew (aka "chain gang") to measure for a new series of downs.

CHOP BLOCK

Similar to a cut block in which one offensive player blocks a defensive player below the knees and another blocks him above the waist. It is illegal to block low if a team mate is already engaged with the defensive player blocking high to prevent knee and ankle injuries.

CHECKDOWN

The checkdown pass is when the Quarterback has to complete a short pass to a Runningback or Tight End as a last resort to avoid a sack. Handling a checkdown situation is for a Runningback to catch these short pass, then use his speed, agility and power to run for extra yardage.

CLIPPING

An illegal block in which the victim is blocked from the back and at or below the waist; the penalty is 15 yards. Originally, clipping was defined as any block from the back, but is now restricted to blocks at or below the waist. Other blocks from the back are now punished with 10-yard penalties.

COFFIN CORNER

The corner of the field of play between the end zone and the 10 yard line. A Punter, if he is close enough, will often attempt to kick the ball out of bounds close to the receiving team's goal line and pin them back near their own end zone.

COMEBACK ROUTE

A Wide Receiver or Tight End route where the player runs straight upfield a specified number of yards (could be a short or medium route), plants hard, and turns and runs back towards the sideline at a 45 degree angle. Often confusingly named, a Wide Receiver doesn't come back towards the Quarterback, instead he tries to catch the ball and guarantee getting out of bounds.

COMPLETION PERCENTAGE

Percentage of passing accuracy. Passes completed divided by passes attempted.

CONTAIN

A defensive assignment. On outside runs such as the sweep, one defensive player (usually a Cornerback or Outside Linebacker) is assigned to keep the rusher from getting to the edge of the play and turning upfield. If executed properly, the rusher will have to turn upfield before the design of the play calls for it, giving the Linebackers a better chance of stopping the play for little or no gain.

CONVERT

An untimed down awarded to a team that has just scored a touchdown. The scoring team receives possession on the opponent's 5-yard line. A place kick or drop kick through the uprights is worth 1 point; a play that would result in an offensive touchdown at other times in the game is worth 2 points. (the terms "conversion", and "point after" are commonly used

CORNERBACK (CB)

A Defensive Back who lines up near the line of scrimmage across from a Wide Receiver. Their primary job is to disrupt passing routes and to defend against short and medium passes in the passing game, and to contain the rusher on rushing plays.

COVER

To cover is an attempt to prevent a Wide Receiver from catching a pass. There are two general schemes for defending against the pass:

1. Man-to-man - each eligible receiver is covered by a Defensive Back or a Linebacker.
2. Zone - certain players (usually Defensive Backs and/or Linebackers, though occasionally Linemen as well) are assigned an area on the field (Flat, Hook, Curl and Deep) that they are to cover.

Common types of coverage:

1. Cover Zero - Strict man-to-man coverage with no help from Safeties (usually a blitz play with at least five men crossing the line of scrimmage)
2. Cover One - Man-to-man coverage with at least one Safety not assigned a player to cover who can help out on deep pass routes.
3. Cover Two - Zone coverage with the Safeties playing deep and covering half the field each. Can be Cover 2 man, where every Wide Receiver is covered by a defensive player, or Cover 2 Zone (also known as Tampa 2), where the Cornerback covers the Flat zone, the Outside Linebackers cover the Hook Zone and Middle Linebacker covers the Curl Zone.

4. Cover Three - Zone coverage as above, but with extra help from the Strong Safety/Cornerback, so that each player covers one-third of a deep zone.
5. Cover Four - As above, with the Cornerbacks and Safeties dropping into deep coverage, with each taking one-fourth of the width of the field. Also referred to as Quarters.

COUNTER

A running play in which the Runningback will take a step in the apparent direction of the play (i.e., the direction the line is moving), only to get the handoff in the other direction. Weak side Linemen will sometimes pull and lead the back downfield (sometimes called a counter trap), but not necessarily. The play is designed to get the defense to flow away from the action for a few steps as they follow the Linemen, allowing more room for the Runningback.

CRACKBACK BLOCK

An illegal block delivered below the opponent's waist by an offensive player who had left the area of close line play and then returned to it, or was not within it at the snap. The term is also used to describe a legal block (delivered from the front, or from the side with the offensive player's helmet in front of the blocked player) by a Wide Receiver on a player who lined up inside of him.

CUT

A sharp change of direction by a running player. Also called a cutback.

CUT BLOCKING

A blocking technique in which Offensive Linemen, and sometimes other blockers, block legally below the waist (i.e., from the front of the defensive player) in an attempt to bring the defenders to ground, making them unable to pursue a running back for the short time needed for the back to find a gap in the defense.

D

DEAD BALL

A ball which is no longer in play.

DEAD-BALL FOUL

A penalty committed by either team before or after the play. If it is after, the result of the play stands and the penalty is assessed from the current position of the ball. Pre-snap penalties on the defense do not require the play to be blown dead unless a defensive player has a clear path to the Quarterback. On the offense, some penalties do stop the play before it begins and some do not. A dead ball foul that does not stop play cannot be declined. A frequent dead ball foul is delay of game.

DEFENSIVE BACK (DB)

A Cornerback, Defensive Halfback or Safety position on the defensive team; commonly defends against Wide Receivers on passing plays. Generally there are at least four Defensive Backs playing at a time; but see Nickel Back and Dime Back.

DEFENSIVE END (DE)

A player position on defense who lines up on the outside of the defensive line and whose principal function is to deliver pressure to the Quarterback. Also known as Rush.

DEFENSIVE HALFBACK

A defensive position on scrimmages. Typical formations include two Defensive Halfbacks, one on each side, but deeper than the Cornerbacks. Their main duty is to cover Wide Receivers. See also Defensive Back.

DEFENSIVE TACKLE (DT)

A player position on defense on the inside of the defensive line and whose principal function is to contain the run. When a Defensive Tackle lines up directly across from the Center, he is known as a Nose

Tackle, often the heaviest player on the defense. When a Defensive Tackle lines up between Offensive Guard and Offensive Tackle, he is known as a 3-gap Technique Tackle.

DEFENSIVE TEAM

The team that begins a play from scrimmage not in possession of the ball.

DELAY OF GAME

A foul which occurs when the offensive team does not put the ball in play before the play clock runs out. There are also less common occurrences which result in a delay of game foul. Penalty: 5 yards.

DIME BACK

The second extra, or sixth total, Defensive Back. Named because a dime has the same value as two nickels. See Nickel Back.

DIRECT SNAP

A play in which the ball is passed directly to the presumed Ball Carrier by the Center. Contrast with an *indirect snap* play in which the ball is first handed to the Quarterback, who will then pass or hand it to the eventual Ball Carrier. Also used to refer to formations that use a direct snap, such as the single wing.

DIVE

A play in which the ball is handed off to the Runningback, who attacks the middle of the offensive formation (between the Offensive Guard).

DOUBLE REVERSE

A play in which the ball reverses direction twice behind the line of scrimmage; this is usually accomplished by means of two or three hand-offs, each hand-off going in an opposite direction as the previous one. Such a play is extremely infrequent in football. Some people confuse the *double reverse* with a *reverse*, which is a play with two hand-offs instead of three.

DOUBLE WING

A formation with two Tight Ends and two Wingbacks in which the snap is tossed by the Center between his legs to the Quarterback or Halfback moderately deep in the backfield.

DOUBLE WING(ED)-T

A formation with two Tight Ends and two Wingbacks in which the Center hands the ball to the Quarterback, who holds his hands between the legs of the Center.

DOWN

A unit of the game that starts with a legal snap or legal free kick after the ball is ready for play and ends when the ball next becomes dead. First down is the first of the plays; fourth is the last down in minor football (third in Senior High School football). A first down occurs after a change of possession of the ball, after advancing the ball 10 yards following a previous first down or after certain penalties.

DOWN BOX The post used with the chain gang to mark the line of scrimmage and designate the current down.

DOWN LINEMAN

A player stationed in front of his line of scrimmage and who has either one (three-point stance) or two (four-point stance) hands on the ground.

DRAW PLAY

A play in which the Quarterback drops back as if to pass, then hands off to a Runningback or runs with the ball himself. Contrast with scramble

DRIBBLED BALL

A dribbled ball is one that has been kicked while not in possession of a player, for example, a loose ball following a fumble, a blocked kick, a kickoff, or a kick from scrimmage. The kicker of the dribbled ball and any player onside when the ball was kicked may legally recover the ball.

DRIVE

1. A continuous set of offensive plays gaining substantial yardage and several first downs, usually leading to a scoring opportunity.
2. A blocking technique - "drive block" - in which an offensive player through an advantaged angle or with assistance drive a defensive player out of position creating a hole for the Ball Carrier.

DROP KICK

A kick in which the ball is dropped and kicked once it hits the ground and before it hits it again; a half-volley kick. A drop kick is one of the types of kick which can score a field goal. Drop kicks are extremely rare due to the pointed nature of the ball.

DUAL-THREAT QUARTERBACK

A Quarterback who is skilled at both passing and rushing the ball. These Quarterbacks may be difficult to defend against since the defensive team cannot focus on one threat to the exclusion of the other.

E

ELIGIBLE RECEIVERS

Players who may legally touch a forward pass. On the passer's team, these are: the Tight Ends, the Runningbacks, Quarterback and the Wide Receivers. All players of the opposing team are eligible receivers, and once the ball is touched by a player of the opposing team beyond the line of scrimmage, all players become eligible.

ENCROACHMENT

An illegal action by a player: to cross the line of scrimmage and make contact with an opponent before the ball is snapped.

END AROUND

A play, often confused with a reverse, where the Quarterback hands the ball off to a Wide Receiver. The Wide Receiver motions/moves into the backfield as the ball is snapped to take the handoff and runs around the opposite end from where he lined up.

END ZONE

The area between the end line (also called deadline) and the goal line, bounded by the sidelines.

EXTRA POINT

A single point scored in a conversion attempt by making what would be a field goal during general play.

F

FACE MASK

The protective grill that forms part of the football helmet.

FACE MASK, GRASPING

A foul in which a player grabs the face mask or helmet opening of another player's helmet, usually in the process of making a tackle. It results in a 15 yard penalty.

FALSE START

The sudden movement of the offense in an effort to draw the defense offside.

FIELD JUDGE

The Official traditionally in charge of timekeeping

FIELD OF PLAY

The area between both the goal lines and the sidelines, and in some contexts the space vertically above it.

FIELD GOAL

A score of 3 points made by place- or drop-kicking the ball through the opponent's goal other than via a kickoff or free kick following a safety; formerly, "goal from the field". A missed field goal can be returned as a punt, if recovered in-bounds by the defending team. If the Field Goal is missed and the opposing team does not run the ball out of the end zone, the team kicking the field goal receives a single point.

FIELD POSITION

A relative measure of how many yards a team must travel in order to score: "good field position" would mean the offense has less distance to cover.

FIRST DOWN

The first of a set of four downs (three in Senior High School). Usually, a team which has a first down needs to advance the ball 10 yards to receive another first down, but penalties or field position (i.e. less than 10 yards from the opposing end zone) can affect this.

FLAG

A weighted yellow cloth thrown by a field Official to indicate that a foul has been committed.

FLANKER

A player position on offense. A Wide Receiver who lines up in the backfield outside of another receiver. The term is used infrequently, having been long since replaced by the "Z" Wide Receiver.

FLAT

An area on the field between the line of scrimmage and 10 yards into the defensive backfield, and within 15 yards of the sideline. Runningbacks often run pass routes to the flat when they are the safety valve receiver.

FLEA FLICKER

A trick play in which a Runningback throws a backward pass back to the Quarterback, who then throws a pass to a Wide Receiver or Tight End.

FLEXBONE

A formation involving three Runningbacks where a Fullback is lined up behind the Quarterback and two Slotbacks are lined up behind the line of scrimmage at both ends of the offensive line.

FLOW

The movement of the Runningbacks after the ball is snapped.

FORMATION

An arrangement of the offensive skill players. A formation usually is described in terms of how the Runningbacks line up (e.g. "I" formation, which refers to the situation where the Tailback is lined up about 7 yards deep, and the Fullback is lined up about 5 yards deep, both directly behind the Quarterback) or how the Wide Receivers line up (e.g. "Trips left", in which three Wide Receivers line up to the left of the linemen). Frequently, the formation will allude to both, such as with Strong I Slot Right, in which the Tailback is lined up 7 yards deep behind the Quarterback, the Fullback is 5 yards deep behind the Guard or Tackle on the strong side, and both Wide Receivers are lined up on the right side of the offensive line. There are rules limiting what is legal in a formation. All five Offensive Linemen must be on the line of scrimmage (a small amount of leeway is given to Tackles when lined up for pass protection). Also, there must be one Wide Receiver (usually one Tight End and one Wide Receiver) lined up on the line on either

side of the Offensive Linemen (it doesn't matter how close they are to the Tackles, as long as they are on the line), with a total of no fewer than seven players on the line, 5 of which must be numbered between 50-79. A numbering exception exists if the offense is in a scrimmage kick formation which allows a player whose number is 1-49 or 80-99 to take the place of a lineman numbered 50-79. A Wide Receiver who is on the line may not go in motion.

FORWARD PASS

A pass that touches a person, object, or the ground closer to the opponent's end line than where it was released from, or is accidentally lost during a forward throwing motion.

FORWARD PROGRESS

The location to which a Ball Carrier's forward momentum carries him before he is tackled. At the end of a play, the football is spotted at the point where the ball carriers forward progress is stopped, even if he is pushed backward by the defenders.

FOURTH DOWN

The final of a set of four downs (three in Senior High School). Unless a first down is achieved or a penalty forces a replay of the down, the team will lose control of the ball after this play. If a team does not think they can get a first down, they often punt or kick a field goal if they are close enough to do so.

FOURTH DOWN CONVERSION (THREE IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL)

The act of using a fourth down play to make a first down (also known as *going for it* [on fourth down]). These are comparatively uncommon. If a team is close enough to the goal posts, they will generally attempt a field goal on fourth down. Otherwise, they will usually punt. However, the coach may elect to try to get a new first down. This is more likely if the amount of yardage needed for the conversion is small (typically a yard or less), if the team is trailing by a significant amount (likelihood of such a try increasing as it gets later in the game), or if a team is in a position where a field goal attempt is unlikely to succeed.

FOUR POINT STANCE

A down lineman's stance with four points on the ground, in other words, his two feet and his two hands; often a technique used in short yardage or goal line situations.

FREE KICK

A kick made to put the ball in play as a kickoff or following a safety.

FREE SAFETY

A player position on defense. Free Safeties typically play deep, or "center field", and often have the pass defense responsibility of assisting other Defensive Backs in deep coverage (compared to Strong Safeties, who usually have an assigned Wide Receiver and run support responsibilities).

FULLBACK

A player position on offense. This position may be varied, and this player has more blocking responsibilities in comparison to the Halfback or Tailback.

FUMBLE

A ball that a player has accidentally lost possession.

G

GOAL

A surface in space marked by a structure of two upright posts 18 feet 6 inches apart extending above a horizontal crossbar whose top edge is 10 feet off the ground. The goal is the surface above the bar and between the lines of the inner edges of the posts, extending infinitely upward, centered above each goal line.

GOAL LINE

The front of the end zone.

GOAL LINE STAND

When a team's defense stops another team's offense from scoring a touchdown when the opposition's offense is near the line.

GRIDIRON

1. The field of play; a football field
2. The game itself, now often used to distinguish among football (soccer), rugby union, rugby league, and American football

The word derives from the same root as *griddle*, meaning a "lattice." The original field was marked in a grid of crisscrossed lines; the ball would be snapped in the grid in which it was downed on the previous play. In modern usage, a gridiron—whether in cooking or football—is considered a surface with *parallel* lines. See also Gridiron football

GUARD

One of two player positions on offense — see Linemen.

GUNSLINGER

Term for a Quarterback who plays with an aggressive and decisive manner by throwing deep, risky passes. These Quarterbacks usually possess the strong arm needed to throw deep effectively.

GUNNER

Players on the Kick-off team who have great speed and whose job is to go directly to the ball and either tackle the Kick Returner or recover the ball. Usually Special Teams will have 3 designated Gunners on the Kick-off team.

A Gunner is also the widest player on the line in a punting formation. The Gunner is often one of the fastest players on the team, usually a Cornerback or Wide Receiver.

H**HAIL MARY**

A long pass play, thrown towards a group of Wide Receivers near the end zone in hope of a touchdown. Used by a team as a last resort as time is running out in either of two halves (usually by a team trailing in the second half).

HALFBACK

A player position on offense. Also known as a Tailback.

HALFBACK OPTION PLAY

A trick play in which the Halfback has the option to throw a pass or run.

HAND-OFF

A player's handing of a live ball to another player. The hand-off goes either backwards or laterally, as opposed to a forward pass.

HANDS TEAM

A group of players, mostly Wide Receivers, that are responsible for recovering an onside kick. They line up as close as possible to the ten-yard neutral zone and their goal is to recover the ball immediately after, but only if, the ball crosses out of the neutral zone.

HARD COUNT

A strategy commonly used by offenses to convert on fourth down (third down in Senior High School) and less than five yards to go. An offense will take the full time on the play clock with the Quarterback utilizing an irregular, accented (thus, the term "hard") cadence for the snap count in the hope that the defense will

jump offside, giving the offense the five yards needed to convert the first down. However, if the defense does not go offside, the offense will take a five-yard penalty for delay of game and punt the ball away.

HASH MARKS

Lines between which the ball begins each play. The lines are parallel to and a distance in from the side lines and marked as broken lines. If a play is blown dead while the ball is between the hash marks, the ball is spotted where it is blown dead for the following play. If the play ends outside the hash marks, the ball is spotted at the nearer hash mark.

H-BACK

A player listed in a roster or depth chart as a Fullback but with better athletic / pass-catching abilities and playing as a *hybrid* of a Fullback and a Tight End

HOLDER

A player who holds the ball upright for a place kick. Often backup Quarterbacks are used for their superior ball-handling ability and in the event of a bad snap requiring a pass play, or Punters for their ability to catch long snaps.

HOLDING

There are two kinds of holding:

Offensive holding, illegally blocking a player from the opposing team by grabbing and holding his uniform or body

Defensive holding, called against defensive players who hold offensive players, but who are not actively making an attempt to catch the ball (if the defensive player were to impede an offensive player in the act of catching the ball, that would be the more severe foul of pass interference)

HOME AND AWAY

A method of scheduling opponents, such that the two teams play one game at each team's home stadium. Also called "home and home games".

HOOK AND LADDER

A trick play in which a Wide Receiver runs a hook pattern (i.e., moving toward the line of scrimmage to make a catch), and then laterals the ball to a second player (generally another Wide Receiver or a Runningback) going in a different direction.

HUDDLE

An on-field meeting of team members to communicate instructions for the upcoming play

HURRY-UP OFFENSE

An offensive strategy designed to gain as much yardage as possible while running as little time off the clock as possible. Often involves making plays without a huddle. This technique can also be used to keep the defensive team off-balance.

I

I-FORMATION

A formation that includes a Fullback and Tailback lined up directly behind the Quarterback while the Quarterback is under the Center. By definition, the Fullback lines up in front of the Tailback. Four variations on this backfield formation exist. 1. "Strong/Near I-formation" is when the Fullback is set to the strong side of the formation relative to the QB & TB. 2. "Weak/Far I-formation" is when the Fullback is set to the weak side of the formation relative to the QB & TB. 3. "Maryland I or Stacked I" formation is where a 3rd back is stacked behind the Tailback, usually at a depth of 7 yards or greater from the line of scrimmage. 4. "Offset Stacked I" is where the 2nd of the three backs is set to either the near or far side of the formation, but still behind the 1st back behind the QB. This is often incorrectly referred to as a "Full-House Backfield."

ILLEGAL FORMATION

On offense, there must be exactly seven players lined up on the line of scrimmage for at least one count before the ball is snapped. If not, then it is an illegal formation.

ILLEGAL MOTION

On offense, a Lineman must be set for one second before the snap. Otherwise it is an illegal motion.

INCOMPLETE PASS

A forward pass of the ball which no player legally caught.

INBOUND LINES

The hash marks.

INDIRECT SNAP

A play in which the ball is handed to the Quarterback rather than thrown directly to the Ball Carrier by the Center as in a *direct snap* play. So named because the Quarterback acts as an intermediary in relaying the ball to the Ball Carrier. Also used to refer to formations that use such a snap, as most modern formations do. Indirect snap formations exploded in popularity after World War II.

INELEGIBLE RECEIVER

Certain players on the offense are not allowed to catch passes. For example, in most situations Offensive Interior Linemen cannot be receivers and they may cause their team to be penalized if they catch the ball. An exception is if the ball has already been tipped by a different player.

INSIDE OF A PLAYER'S PATH

Relatively close (in reference to the sides of the field) to where the ball was snapped from. Thus, a Ball Carrier's path in crossing the neutral zone may be said to be "inside" of an opponent, or an "inside run" in general, and a rushing defensive player may be said to put on an "inside move" or "inside rush".

INSIDE OF THE MOVEMENT OF THE BALL BETWEEN PLAYERS

Directed toward a player who cuts between a player in the backfield who throws or hands the ball and the place from which it was snapped. Thus, an "inside pass" or "inside hand-off". An "inside reverse" (sometimes called a scissors play) is a reverse play via an inside handoff.

INTENTIONAL GROUNDING

A type of illegal forward pass; thrown without an intended receiver and no chance of completion to any offensive player, for the sole purpose of conserving time or loss of yardage. This foul costs the offense a loss of down and 10 yards. If it occurs 10 yards behind the line of scrimmage, then the 10 yards is taken from the spot of the foul. If the foul is committed in the end zone the penalty is a safety. Intentional grounding is not called in the case of a spike after a hand to hand snap or if the Quarterback was outside the tackle box, (the imaginary area between each Tackle) at the time of the pass, provided that the ball travels at least to the line of scrimmage. The Tackle Box is also known as the Pocket.

INTERCEPTION

The legal catching of a forward pass thrown by an opposing player.

J

JACK

Weak Side Inside Linebacker (ILB) of a four Linebacker formation. Also known as Mo or

JUMBO

An offensive package which includes two Tight Ends, a Fullback and a Halfback. Similar to heavy jumbo, in which either the Halfback or the Fullback is replaced by another Tight End.

KICK

1. As a verb, to strike the ball deliberately with the foot
2. As a noun, such an action producing a punt, place kick, or drop kick

K**KICKER**

Player who specializes in placekicking (i.e. field goals and kick offs).

KICK-OFF

A free kick which starts each half, or restarts the game following a touchdown or field goal.

KICK RETURNER

A player on the receiving team who specializes in fielding kicks and running them back.

KNEEL

A low risk play in which the player in possession of the ball kneels down after receiving the snap, ending the play. Used to run out the clock. (Also called "take a knee".) Most commonly, the Quarterback will down the ball immediately after the snap in the time after the two-minute warning. Another notable situation is for a player to give up scoring a touchdown and instead take a knee short of the goal line; this would be done when his team is leading and the opposition probably has no timeouts left, and the team with the ball can then run out the clock and preserve the lead.

L**LATERAL**

A pass thrown with no motion toward either end zone.

LINE OF SCRIMMAGE/SCRIMMAGE LINE

One of two vertical planes parallel to the goal line when the ball is to be put in play by scrimmage. The two lines of scrimmage are called *offensive line of scrimmage* and *defensive line of scrimmage*. The offensive line of scrimmage is the vertical plane of the furthest tip of the ball from the offensive line. The line of scrimmage of the defensive team is one yard on their side of the ball.

LINE TO GAIN

A line parallel to the goal lines, such that having the ball dead beyond it entitles the offense to a new series of downs, i.e. a new "first down". The line is 10 yards in advance of where the ball was to be snapped for the previous first down (or is the goal line, if it is not farther than 10 yards away).

LINEBACKER (LB)

A player position on defense. The Linebackers typically play 1 to 6 yards behind the Defensive Linemen and are the most versatile players on the field because they can defend both run and pass defense or called to blitz. There are two types of LB: Middle Linebacker (MLB) and Outside Linebackers (OLB). In 3-4 formation Outside Linebacker (OLB) may be designated as a "rush linebacker", rushing the passer on almost every play.

LINEMAN

A defensive or offensive position on the line of scrimmage. On offense, the player snapping the ball is the Center. The players on either side of him are the Guards, and the players to the outside of him are the Tackles. The players on the end of the line are the Tight Ends. This may be varied in an unbalanced line. On defense, the outside linemen are Ends, and those inside are Tackles.

LIVE BALL

Any ball that is in play, whether it is a player's possession or not. The ball is live during plays from scrimmage and free kicks, including kickoffs.

LIVE BALL FOUL

A foul given for various infractions such as changing numbers during a game

LONG SNAPPER

A Center who specializes in the long, accurate snaps required for punts and field goal attempts. Most teams employ a specialist Long Snapper instead of requiring the normal Center to perform this duty.

LOOSE BALL

Any ball that is in play and not in a player's possession. This includes a ball in flight during a backward or forward pass.

LOSING RECORD

A regular season record when a team loses more games than it wins. A losing record corresponds to a winning percentage less than .500. See also: non-winning record, winning record, and winning percentage.

M**MAN COVERAGE**

Same as man-to-man coverage

MAN IN MOTION

A player on offense who is moving backwards frontwards or parallel to the line of scrimmage just before the snap. More than one back can be in motion, and may move in any direction as long as they are behind the line of scrimmage at the snap.

MAN TO MAN COVERAGE

A defense in which all players in pass coverage, typically Linebackers and Defensive Backs, cover a specific player. Pure man coverage is very rare; defenses typically mix man and zone coverage.

MARGIN OF VICTORY

The total difference in points in a game, expressed as possessed by the winning team.

MARTY BALL

A conservative game plan which involves an offense based around the use of Halfbacks with use of the passing game only to advance the running game, and a great emphasis on defense. Popularized term for Marty Schottenheimer's approach.

MAXIMUM PROTECTION

A modification used on pass plays (usually combined with a shotgun formation) which keeps the Tight Ends and both backs in behind the line of scrimmage to pass protect rather than run a pass route. This is used in obvious blitzing situations to give the Quarterback "maximum protection" in the pocket. Although good for holding off a blitz, it leaves the Quarterback with only two Wide Receivers to throw to (and therefore only two players for the secondary to defend).

MIKE (MLB)

The Middle Linebacker in 4-3 formation. In a four Linebacker formation, Mike is the Strong Side Inside Linebacker (ILB). Mike has the responsibility to defend the interior gaps and the Curl Zone. Mike is the leader of the defense and has to be as bright as a Quarterback because often he calls the audible on defense.

MO

Also known as Jack or Mack. The Weak Side Inside Linebacker (ILB) of a four Linebacker formation.

MONSTER

Sometimes monster man, a player position on the defensive team. The monster is a Strong Safety in a four-deep secondary with the ability to cover deep zones, able to be tough against runs and, on occasion, play on the line of scrimmage.

MOTION

The ordered movement of eligible receivers prior to the snap. Motion can be used to gain mismatches, i.e. physical advantages against specific defensive personnel, e.g. a fast pre-snap read of the defensive coverage, e.g. motioning a Wide Receiver from one side of the formation to the other may help in identifying zone versus man coverage. Generally, if the coverage is man the Wide Receiver's defender will follow him across the formation and if it is zone coverage the defenders will exchange responsibilities by shifting or bumping over.

MUFF

A loose ball that is dropped or mishandled while the player is attempting to gain possession.

MUFFED PUNT

Occurs when there is an "uncontrolled touch" of the football after it is punted. May be recovered but not advanced by the kicking team.

N**NEUTRAL ZONE**

The region between the lines of scrimmage or between the free kick restraining lines.

NICKEL BACK

An extra, or fifth, Defensive Back. Named after the coin, worth five cents. Used in situations where a forward pass is likely.

NO END

A penalty on the offence for having fewer than seven players within one yard of the line of scrimmage at the snap. It is most often called on field goal attempts because of the curved formation of linemen used: if the line is curved back too far, the ends are too far back to be considered linemen, and are called for "illegal procedure: no end".

NO GOOD

Unsuccessful; often said of an unsuccessful field goal attempt.

NO-HUDDLE OFFENSE

A tactic wherein the offense quickly forms near the line of scrimmage without huddling before the next play.

NO YARDS

A penalty against the kicking team: all players on the kicking team must be at least five yards from the ball when it is first touched by a member of the receiving team. The penalty is 15-yards but is reduced to five yards if the ball hits the ground before being touched.

NON-WINNING RECORD

A regular season record when a team wins a number of games equal to or less than it loses. A non-winning record corresponds to a winning percentage equal to or less than .500. See also: losing record, winning record, and winning percentage.

NON-WINNING RECORD

A season when a team wins a number of games equal to or less than it loses. See also: losing season and winning season.

NOSE TACKLE

A tackle in a 3-man defensive line who lines up "opposite the Center's nose". Contrary to a regular Defensive Tackle, a Nose Tackle is often much larger and considered the 'anchor' of the line, effective at disrupting blocking schemes and stopping runs.

O

OFFENSIVE TEAM

The team with possession of the ball

OFFSIDE

An infraction of the rule that requires both teams to be on their own side of their restraining line as or before the ball is put play or, at the time a ball is kicked by a teammate, being ahead of the ball. Offside is normally called on the defensive team during a scrimmage down and on the kicking team during free kick downs.

ONE BACK FORMATION

A formation where the offensive team has one Runningback (Singleback) in the backfield with the Quarterback. Other eligible receivers are near the line of scrimmage.

ONSIDE KICK

The Kicking team deliberately kicks the ball just over 10 yards on a kick-off in an attempt to make an onside kick. These kick-offs are usually directed towards the sideline (left sideline for a right-footed kicker) to give members of the kicking team time to get downfield to recover it. It is illegal procedure if the ball is recovered before it has gone 10 yards downfield.

OPTION RUN

Usually, a type of play in which the Quarterback has the option of handing off, keeping, or laterally passing to one or more backs. Often described by a type of formation or play action, such as triple option, veer option, or counter option. Teams running option plays often specialize in them. Less often, a play in which a back may either pass or run.

OPTION OFFENSE

An offense heavily relying upon the option run and variations thereof.

OUTSIDE

Player is outside of where the ball was snapped from. Thus, a ball carrier's path in crossing the neutral zone may be said to be "outside" of an opponent, or an "outside run" in general, and a rushing defensive player may be said to put on an "outside move" or "outside rush".

P

PACKAGE

The group of players on the field for a given play. For example, the Nickel Package substitutes a Cornerback for either a Linebacker or a Defensive Lineman (the latter is referred to as a 3-3-5 Nickel), or the Jumbo package substitutes a Wide Receiver with a Tight End.

PASS INTERFERENCE

When a player illegally hinders an eligible receiver's opportunity to catch a forward pass.

PASSER RATING OR QUARTERBACK RATING

A numeric value used to measure of the performance of Quarterbacks. It was formulated in 1973 and it uses the player's completion percentage, passing yards, touchdowns and interceptions.

PASSING PLAY

A play in which a forward pass is made.

PASS PROTECTION

The use of blocking by the offensive line and backs to allow the Quarterback time and space to throw the ball.

PASSING TREE

The "passing tree" describes a series of routes that a Wide Receiver can run to get open so he can be in position to catch the football. In offensive plays that include a pass, these routes are known as the passing tree.

P.A.T.

The "Point-After-Touchdown" in which the scoring team tries to kick, run, or pass the ball into the endzone for 1 or 2 extra points.

PICK

1. Use of one player to block a second player.
2. An interception of a pass, e.g. a pass by the offense can be "picked off" by the defense.

PICK-SIX

An interception ("pick") that is returned to the passing team's end zone for a touchdown ("six").

PISTOL FORMATION

A hybrid version of the shotgun in which the Quarterback lines up about 3 yards behind the Center and the Singleback lines up directly behind the Quarterback.

PLACE KICK

Kicking the ball from where it has been placed stationary on the ground or, where legal, on a tee.

PLAY

1. See down.
2. The plan of action the offensive team has for each snap, for example a running play or pass play.

PLAY ACTION

A tactic in which the Quarterback fakes either a handoff or a throw in order to draw the defense away from the intended offensive method

PLAY CLOCK

A timer used to increase the pace of the game between plays. The offensive team must snap the ball before the time expires, or receive a 5 yard delay of game foul.

PLAY SIDE

The side of the defensive formation the offensive play runs or passes towards.

PLAYING FIELD

The area between both the goal lines and the sidelines, and in some contexts the space vertically above it.

POCKET

An area on the offensive side of the line of scrimmage, where the offensive linemen attempt to prevent the defensive players from reaching the Quarterback during passing plays.

POINTS PERCENTAGE

A statistic used in league standings for comparing win-loss or win-loss-tie records. It is an alternative to the winning percentage.

Mathematically: $P = (2w + t + x) / (2g)$ where P is winning percentage, w is number of wins, t is number of ties, x is number of overtime losses, and g is number of games played.

POOCH KICK

A punt or kickoff that is deliberately kicked with less than full force. It is often used in an attempt to limit the ability of the return team to return the ball.

POST PATTERN

A passing route in which the receiver sprints 8 to 10 yards, fake, look back at QB, then sprint deep at 45 degrees, the opposite pattern is the flag route. It is called a post pattern because the middle of the field is where the goal posts are found.

POSITION

A place where a player plays relative to teammates, and/or a role filled by that player

POSSESSION

1. Having the ball on offense for a number of downs, ultimately resulting in either a score, a turn-over, or the end of the half.
2. Physical control of the ball after a pass or fumble.

PRESEASON

Games that do not count toward the final team standings. These games are used to pick final team rosters. Star players often have limited playing time during preseason.

PREVENT DEFENSE

A defensive strategy that utilizes deep zone coverage in order to prevent a big pass play from happening down field, usually at the expense of giving up yards at shorter distances. Often used against Hail Mary plays, or at the end of the game when the defending team is protecting a lead.

PRO SET Offensive formation using two backs, lined up side-by-side 2-3 yards behind the Quarterback, with one on either side of the Quarterback

PULLING

A term used to describe an Offensive Lineman who, instead of blocking the player in front of him, steps back and moves down the line("pulls") to block another player, usually in a "trap" or "sweep."

PUMP FAKE

When the Quarterback fakes a pass and keeps the ball in his hand in an attempt to fool the defensive team.

PUNT

A kick in which the ball is dropped and kicked before it reaches the ground. Used to give up the ball to the opposition after offensive downs have been used, as far down the field as possible.

PUNT RETURN

When a punt is fielded by the receiving team and advanced for better field position. The punt returner generally attempts to move the ball as far up the field as possible. A receiver can also immediately punt the ball back, though this strategy is not used in modern football.

PUNTER (P)

A kicker who specializes in punting as opposed to place kicking.

Q**QUARTER**

One of four periods of play in a standard football game. A quarter lasts for fifteen game clock minutes in most adaptation but may take longer in elapsed time, since the clock does not run continuously. A tie at the end of four quarters may result in overtime.

QUARTERBACK (QB)

An offensive player who lines up behind the Center, from whom he takes the snap.

QUARTERBACK RATING

A numeric value used to measure of the performance of Quarterbacks. It was formulated in 1973 and it uses the player's completion percentage, passing yards, touchdowns and interceptions.

QUARTERBACK SCRAMBLE

See Scramble.

QUARTERBACK SNEAK

A play most commonly used in very short yardage or goal line situations. The Quarterback quickly takes the snap and runs right behind or beside the Center.

QUARTER DEFENSE

Defensive formation with seven Defensive Backs, three Down Linemen and one Linebacker.

QUICK KICK

An unexpected punt. A type of trick play: a punt from a running or passing formation, usually on second down. The play relies on catching the defense by surprise and using an onside player to recover the ball and gain a first down or even a touchdown.

R**RECEPTION**

When a player catches (receives) the ball past the line of scrimmage. If a reception is made behind the line of scrimmage, it is a lateral.

RED FLAG

A weighted red marker thrown onto the field by a coach to tell the officials that he wants a certain play reviewed. Sometimes referred to as "challenge flag."

RED ZONE

The area between the 20 yard line and the goal of the defensive team. The area is not literally colored red and the term is used mainly for statistical purposes; a team that has a high "red zone percentage" (number of touchdowns scored from within the red zone divided by number of drives in which the team enters the red zone) is capable of finishing drives with touchdowns on a regular basis.

REFEREE (R)

The Official who directs the other Officials on the field: one of seven officials.

REGULAR SEASON

The portion of the season that is scheduled ahead-of-time. It excludes any championship, or playoff games.

RESTRAINING LINE

1. A team's respective line of scrimmage
2. At a free kick, the line the ball is to be kicked from (for the kicking team), or a line 10 yards in advance of that (for the receiving team)

RETURN

The act of progressing the ball down the field after a change of possession, such as a kick or interception. (E.g. "He returned the interception for a touchdown".)

RETURN YARDS

Yards gained advancing the ball during play after a change of possession such as a punt or a kickoff or a turnover such as a fumble or an interception.

REVERSE

An offensive play in which a Runningback carries the ball toward one side of the field but hands or tosses the ball to a teammate (almost exclusively a Wide Receiver) who is running in the opposite direction. Contrast to an End Around, in which the ball is handed off directly to a Wide Receiver (usually the man in motion), so the direction of the play never reverses.

ROAD GAME

A game played in the opponent's home stadium. Games at neutral sites are generally not considered road games although they are "away from home".

RUN AND SHOOT

An offensive philosophy designed to force the defense to show its hand prior to the snap of the ball by splitting up receivers and sending them in motion. Receivers run patterns based on the play of the defenders, rather than a predetermined plan. Also known as 'Run & Gun'.

RUNNING BACK (RB)

A player position on offense. Although the term usually refers to the Halfback or Tailback, Fullbacks are also considered Runningbacks.

RUNNING OUT THE CLOCK

A game strategy that involves repeatedly executing simple plays that allow the game clock to continue running in an effort to bring the game to a quicker end. This strategy is almost always employed by the leading team at the end of the game, and may involve one or more Quarterback kneels.

RUNNING PLAY

A play where the offense attempts to advance the ball without a forward pass.

RUNNING UP THE SCORE

A generally discouraged practice in which a team, despite leading by several touchdowns (to the point that it is obvious that the team is going to win), continues to score as many points as possible in an effort to create as wide of a margin of victory as possible.

RUN OUT OF THE GUN

Running the ball out of the shotgun formation, which is primarily a pass formation.

RUSH

1. An attempt to tackle or hurry a player before he can throw a pass or make a kick.
2. A running play.

RUSHING AVERAGE OR YARDS PER CARRY AVERAGE

The quotient of a player's total rushing yards divided by the number of rushing attempts.

S

SACK

Tackling a Ball Carrier who intends to throw a forward pass. A sack is also awarded if a player forces a fumble of the ball, or the Ball Carrier goes out of bounds, behind the line of scrimmage on an apparent intended forward pass play.

SAFETY

1. A player position on defense — see Free Safety and Strong Safety.
2. A method of scoring (worth two points) by downing an opposing Ball Carrier in his own end zone, forcing the opposing Ball Carrier out of his own end zone and out of bounds, or forcing the offensive team to fumble the ball so that it exits the end zone. A safety is also awarded if the offensive team commits a foul within its own end zone. After a safety, the team that was scored upon must kick the ball to the scoring team from its own 20-yard line. A safety scored during a try scores 2 points and is followed by a kickoff as for any other try.

SAFETY VALVE

A receiver whose job it is to get open for a short pass in case all other receivers are covered.

SAM (OLB)

The Strong Side Outside Linebacker

SCATBACK

A Runningback that is generally very fast, and good at juking and making defenders miss as opposed to running them over on purpose like a 'power' back.

SCRAMBLE OR QUARTERBACK SCRAMBLE

On a called passing play, when the Quarterback runs from the pocket in an attempt to avoid being sacked, giving the receivers more time to get open or attempting to gain positive yards by running himself.

SCREEN PASS

A short forward pass to a receiver who has blockers in front of him. The receiver in this play is usually a Runningback, although Wide Receiver and Tight End screens are also used. Although they are both called screen passes, the Wide Receiver screen and the Runningback screen are used for very different reasons. In the case of a Runningback screen, the play is designed to allow the pass rushers by the Offensive Linemen, leaving the defender out of position to make a play. The play is usually employed to defuse the pass rush in the case of a Runningback screen. The Wide Receiver screen is a much faster developing play, designed to catch the defense off Guard.

SCRIMMAGE

1. An informal practice matchup, either between two teams or between different units of the same team. Usually score is not kept; often, each team will get 10 plays from the same yard line. Sometimes played "7 on 7," with a full backfield and an abbreviated offensive line.
2. play from scrimmage
3. line of scrimmage

SECONDARY

Refers to the defensive "backfield", specifically the Safeties and Cornerbacks. Primarily responsible for pass coverage/defense.

SHIELD PUNT

When 7 men line up on the line of scrimmage and immediately start to cover the punt while 3 offensive players stay to Guard the Punter.

SHIFT

When two or more offensive players move at the same time before the snap.

SHOOTING

The action of a Linebacker or Defensive Back to blitz.

SHORT SIDE

The side of the field with the with the shortest distance between the ball and the sideline.

SHOT GUN

Formation in which offensive team may line up at the start of a play. In this formation, the Quarterback receives the snap 5-8 yards behind the Center.

SIDELINE

1. One of the lines marking each side of the field
2. As an adjective: on the field near a sideline

SIDE ZONE

The area between a hash mark and a sideline.

SINGLE OR ROUGE

A one-point score. The Kicking Team scores a single when the ball is punted, drop kicked, or place kicked into the receiving team's end zone (without scoring a field goal or hitting the goal post) and the receiving team fails to run or kick the ball back into the field of play. The single also is scored if the kick goes out of bounds in the end zone, except on a kickoff. On a kickoff, the single is scored only if the ball stays inbounds and is not run out of the zone, or if the defense puts the ball out of bounds in the end zone.

SINGLE WING-T

A formation with 1 wingback & an adjoining Tight End in which the Center hands the ball to the Quarterback, who holds his hands between the legs of the Center.

SLANT

A receiver route. In the slant route, a receiver runs straight up field a few yards, plants his outside foot hard while in full stride, and turns 45 degrees towards the Quarterback. A staple of the West Coast Offense(WCO) and the player may go as little as 2 yards or as many as 6 yards before moving inside for the pass. Variations include the quick slant in which the player plants and turns at the snap instead of running ahead first and the Slow or Zone route, in which the receiver runs 10 to 15 yards downfield to get behind the linebackers before turning.

SLOT

The area between a split end and the rest of the Offensive Line. A Wide Receiver lined up in the slot at the snap of the ball may be called a Slotback or Slot Receiver.

SNAP

The handoff or pass from the Center that begins a play from scrimmage.

SNAP COUNT

The "hut" sound the Quarterback will use to signal for the snap to be made.

SNEAK

An offensive play in which the Quarterback, immediately on receiving the snap dives forward with the ball. The play is used when a team needs a very short gain to reach either the goal line or the line to gain.

SPEARING

An unnecessary roughness penalty of 15 yards imposed when the player drives his helmet into an opponent in an unnecessary and excessive manner. The referee's signal is a chopping motion above the head.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The units that handle kickoffs, punts, free kicks and field goal attempts. Often manned by second and third team players.

SPIKE

A play in which the Quarterback throws the ball at the ground immediately after the snap. Technically an incomplete pass, it stops the clock. Note that a spike is not considered intentional grounding if it is done with the Quarterback under center and immediately after the snap; the only "penalty" is that one down is sacrificed. Running a spike play presumes there will be at least one play by the same team immediately afterward, so it would not be done on 4th down or if it would run the clock out (the clock is probably running while the teams are lining up for the play). If for either reason, a spike cannot be run, a Quarterback whose first choice was to spike the ball would have to run a regular play instead.

SPLIT-T

T formation in which the gaps between offensive Guards & tackles are nearly twice as large as the gaps between the center & the Guards.

SPLITS

The distance between the feet of adjacent offensive linemen. Said to be wide, if there is a large gap between players, or narrow, if the gap is small.

SPLIT END

A player position on offense. A receiver who lines up on the line of scrimmage, several yards outside the interior offensive linemen. The term is now rarely used in American Football, having been long since replaced by the wide receiver or wideout, with no distinction between whether the receiver is on the line or not.

SPOT

The location determined by the official where the ball was downed or blown dead.

SPREAD

An offensive formation where the offense has four or five Wide Receivers spread across the field with an empty backfield or only a backfield containing a Singleback prior to the snap. This formation forces the defense to also spread out and makes defensive coverage difficult. Primarily used for passing.

SQUIB KICK

A type of kickoff in which the ball is intentionally kicked low to the ground, typically bouncing on the ground a few times before being picked up. This is done in the hopes of preventing a long return, as the ball is often picked up by one of the upmen as opposed to the designated kickoff returner.

STARTER

A player who is the first to play his position within a given game or season. Depending on the position and the game situation, this player may be replaced or share time with one or more players later in the game. As an example, a Quarterback may start the game but be replaced by a backup Quarterback if the game becomes one-sided. A Runningback may start the game but share time with another Runningback in specific situations or to provide the opportunity for rest during the game.

STICKS

The pole attached to the end of the 10-yard chain that is used by the chain crew to measure for a new series of downs — i.e. the line to gain a new "first down".

STIFF-ARM OR STRAIGHT ARM

A Ball Carrier warding off a would-be tackler by pushing them away with a straight arm.

STRIP

To remove a football from the player carrying it.

STRONG-I

A formation wherein the Tailback is lined up deep directly behind the Quarterback, and the Fullback is lined up offset to the strong side of the formation.

STRONG SAFETY (SS)

A kind of Safety on defense, as opposed to a Free Safety. This is a central defensive back; originally, the term indicated that he lined up on the strong side of the field and covered the Tight End. However, the modern usage of the term now indicates a central defensive back with responsibility for run and pass support, slightly favoring run support.

STRONG SIDE

The side of the field (left or right) that has the most players, but it depends on the formations of the teams. When a team uses one Tight End, the strong side is the side of the field where the Tight End lines up. If the offensive package uses no Tight End, or more than one Tight End, the strong side is the side of the field with the most offensive players on or just behind the line of scrimmage.

STUFF

A tackle of a Ball Carrier on a running play, behind the line of scrimmage. Compare to sack.

STUNT

A tactic used by defensive linemen in which they switch roles in an attempt to get past the blockers. Both defenders will start with power rushes, with the stunting defender getting more of a push. The other lineman will then go around him, ideally using him as a pick to get free from his blocker.

SWEEP

A running play in which several blockers lead a Runningback on a designed play to the outside. Depending on the number of blockers and the design of the play this is sometimes referred to as a "power sweep" or "student-body-right" (or left).

T

T-FORMATION

A classic offensive formation with the Quarterback directly behind the Center and three Runningbacks behind the Quarterback, forming a 'T'. Numerous variations have been developed including the split-T, wing-T, and wishbone-T

TACKLE

1. The act of forcing a ball carrier to the ground
2. A player position on the line, either an offensive tackle (**T**) or a defensive tackle (**DT**) — see linemen.

TACKLE BOX

The area between where the two offensive Tackles line up prior to the snap.

TACKLE ELIGIBLE

A lineman that lines himself up in the position of an eligible receiver.

TAILBACK

Player position on offense farthest ("deepest") back, except in kicking formations. Also often referred to as the Runningback.

TAKE A KNEE

See kneel.

THREE AND OUT

When an offensive team fails to gain a first down on the first three plays of a drive, and thus is forced to punt on fourth down. If playing three down football, the offensive team fails to gain a first down on the first two downs and are forced to punt on the third down.

THREE MINUTE WARNING

The three-minute warning is given when three minutes of game time remain on the game clock in the first and second halves of a game.

THREE POINT STANCE

A down lineman's stance with three points on the ground, in other words, his two feet and one of his hands.

TIGHT END

A player position on offense who lines up on the line of scrimmage, next to the offensive tackle. Tight ends are used as blockers during running plays, and either run a route or stay in to block during passing plays. There may be one or two Tight Ends on the field, depending on the offensive formation.

TIME COUNT

A foul committed when the offense fails to put the ball in play within 20 seconds of the ball being declared ready for play by an official. Penalty: Before the three-minute warning and during convert attempts at any time in the game, 5 yards with the down repeated. After the three-minute warning, loss of down on first or second down and 10 yards on third down; the referee has the right to give possession to the defense for repeated time count violations on third down.

TIME OF POSSESSION

The amount of time one team has the ball in its possession relative to the other team. Since there are 60 minutes in a non-overtime game, and one team or another always has possession of the ball, the two teams divide up the time with which they have the ball out of the 60 minutes. If one team has it 40 minutes the other will have it 20 and so forth. A time of possession advantage is seen as a positive thing and is highly correlative with a win or loss. Teams that dominate time of possession usually have good defenses (that can keep the opposing team's offense from mounting many long drives) and solid offenses (usually with good running games as running plays keep the clock running more often than passing plays).

TOTAL OFFENSE

A statistic that combines yards rushing and yards passing.

TOUCHBACK

The act of downing the ball behind one's own goal line on a kickoff or punt after the ball had been propelled over the goal by the opposing team. This can be accomplished by one of several ways: the receiving team player catching the ball in the end zone and dropping down to one knee; by the ball touching any part of the end zone; the ball carrying out of the end zone in any way without being possessed by either team. After a touchback, the team that downed it gets the ball at their own 20-yard line.

TOUCHDOWN

A play worth six points, accomplished by gaining legal possession of the ball in the opponent's end zone or by the ball crossing the plane of the opponent's goal line with legal possession by a player. It also allows the team a chance for one extra point by kicking the ball or a two point conversion; see try.

TRAP

A basic blocking pattern in which a defensive lineman is allowed past the line of scrimmage, only to be blocked at an angle by a "pulling" lineman. Designed to gain a preferred blocking angle and larger hole in the line.

TRICK PLAY

Any of a variety of plays that use deception to catch the other team off guard. Famous trick plays include the fake punt (kick), "Statue of Liberty", flea-flicker, Center-eligible, surprise on-side kick and Halfback pass plays. These plays are often dangerous, as most upper level teams have too much skill and experience to be fooled for long.

TRIPS

A formation in which 3 Wide Receivers are lined up on the same side of the field, with one on the LOS and usually the others flanking the WR one yard off the LOS (as in Slot or Wing, though only one yard off the WR, each way).

TURN THE BALL OVER ON DOWNS

When a team uses all of their downs without either scoring or making a first down, they must relinquish the ball to the other team.

TURNOVER

The loss of the ball by one team to the other team. This is usually the result of a fumble or an interception.

TWO POINT CONVERSION

A play worth two points accomplished by gaining legal possession of the ball in the opponent's end zone, either via a run or pass, after a touchdown has been made; see try.

U**UNBALANCED LINE**

Usually refers to an offensive formation which does not have an equal number of linemen on each side of the ball. Done to gain a blocking advantage on one side of the formation; typically one tackle or Guard lines up on the other side of the ball. For example a common alignment would be E-G-C-G-T-T-E.

UNDER CENTER

Refers to the Quarterback lining up directly behind the Center to take the snap. Contrast with shotgun formation.

UPBACK

A player, in a scrimmage kick (punts and field goals) or kneel formations, who lines up behind the offensive line. An Upback's primary duty is to block oncoming defensive players in a kick formation and to recover any fumbles in a kneel formation. They can receive direct snaps, and Upbacks are eligible receivers.

UPMAN

During a kickoff, every player on the return team is called an "upman" with the exception of the one or two designated kickoff returners, who stand furthest away from the starting point of the kicking team.

UTILITY PLAYER

A player capable of playing multiple positions.

V**VEER**

A type of option offense using 2 backs in the backfield, one behind each Guard or Tackle (referred to as Splitbacks), allowing a triple option play (give to either back or Quarterback keep).

W**WEAK-I**

A formation wherein the Tailback is lined up deep directly behind the Quarterback, and the Fullback is lined up offset to the weak side of the formation.

WEAK SIDE

When one Tight End is used, the side of the field opposite the Tight End. In other offensive packages, the side of the field with the fewest offensive players on or just behind the line of scrimmage.

WEST COAST OFFENSE

An offensive philosophy that uses short, high-percentage passes as the core of a ball-control offense. The basis of the offense is to use short routes for receivers, delivering the ball on time and accurately and using short passes to replace runs. It relies heavily on RAC yardage, using many eligible receivers on plays to maximize Quarterback options, and spreading the ball to many targets to keep the defense confused.

WHEEL ROUTE

A pass route in which the receiver, often a Runningback, travels parallel along the line of scrimmage and then takes off up the field.

WIDE

Adjective meaning towards the sidelines. Example: A kick that is "wide right" has missed to the right side of the field from the perspective of the offense.

WIDE RECEIVER

A player position on offense. He is split wide (usually about 10 yards) from the formation and plays on the line of scrimmage as a split end (X) or one yard off as a flanker (Z). The offensive-formation rules regarding the number of backs and linemen are still used.

WIDE SIDE

The side of the field with the longest distance between the ball and the sidelines.

WILDCAT OFFENSE

An offensive philosophy that dictates that either a Quarterback or a Runningback can receive a direct snap from the snapper; it is often compared to the single wing.

WILL (OLB)

The Weak Side Linebacker.

WIN-LOSS-TIE

The ratio of wins to losses (and if necessary, ties), expressed as a pair or trio of numbers. For example, 6-1 means 6 wins and 1 loss and 5-3-1 means 5 wins, 3 losses and 1 tie.

WINGBACK

A player position in some offensive formations (Flexbone). Lines up just outside the Tight End and one yard off the line of scrimmage. A versatile position that can be used as a receiver, blocker, and/or runner of reverses.

WINNING PERCENTAGE

A statistic used in league standings to compare and/or rank teams based on their win-loss (or win-loss-tie) records. Winning percentage is calculated by dividing the number of games won by the number of games played. A tie counts as one-half of a win. The winning percentage is not increased nor decreased by tied games. These values are expressed as a decimal (eg: .600 *not* 60.0%). See also: points percentage.

Mathematically: $P_w = (w + (0.5t)) / (g)$ where P_w is winning percentage, w is number of wins, t is number of ties, and g is number of games played.

WINNING RECORD

A regular season record when a team wins a number of games greater than it loses. A winning record corresponds to a winning percentage greater than .500 ($P_w > .500$). See also: losing record, non-winning record, and winning percentage.

WINNING SEASON

A season when a team wins a number of games greater than it loses. See also: losing season and non-winning season.

WISHBONE

A formation involving three Runningbacks lined up behind the Quarterback in the shape of a Y, similar to the shape of a wishbone.

X

X-RECEIVER

Term used in play calling that usually refers to the Split End, or the Wide Receiver that lines up on the line of scrimmage. For example, "Split Right Jet 529 X Post" tells the X-receiver to run a post route.

Y

YAC

1. Short for "Yards After Catch", the amount of yardage gained after initial catch. A Quarterback's length of pass is the distance from where the line of scrimmage is, to where the receiver caught the ball. YAC is the distance the Ball Carrier ran after the initial catch. Screen pass plays boosts YAC effectively due to the short passes, and the receiver has to run to increase yardage.
2. Yards After Contact.

Y-RECEIVER

Term usually used in offensive play calling to refer to the Slotback.

YARD

One yard of linear distance in the direction of one of the two goals. A field is 110 yards. Typically, a team is required to advance at least 10 yards in order to get a new set of downs. Identical in length to the standard unit of measurement (3 feet or 36 inches or exactly 0.9144 metre).

YARD LINE

A marking on the field that indicates the distance (in yards) to the nearest goal line.

YARDAGE

The amount of yards gained or lost during a play, game, season, or career.

YARDS GAINED

See yardage.

YARDS FROM SCRIMMAGE

The amount of yards gained by the offensive team advancing the ball from the line of scrimmage.

YELLOW FLAG

A weighted yellow cloth thrown by a field official to indicate that a foul has been committed.

Z

Z-RECEIVER

A term used in offensive play calling that usually refers to the Flanker, or the Wide Receiver that lines up off the line of scrimmage. For example, "Panther Gun 85 Slant Z Go" tells the Z-receiver to run a go (also called a fly or streak) route.

ZONE DEFENSE

A defense in which players who are in pass coverage cover zones of the field, instead of individual players. Pure zone packages are seldom used; most defenses employ some combination of zone and man coverage.

ZONE BLITZ

A defensive package combining a blitz with zone pass coverage. Allows the defense to choose the blitzer after the offense shows formation and pass coverage requirements, and features unpredictable blitzes from different Linebackers and Defensive Backs.

ZONE READ

A type of option offense where the Quarterback and Tailback line up approximately side by side. After the Quarterback receives the snap, the two players cross paths and go through the motions of a hand-off. Based upon reading the defensive reaction, the Quarterback either completes the handoff or pulls the ball out and runs with it.

