

FOOTBALL 101

By Football Canada

Objective of the Game:

The basic objective of tackle football is for nine people, through a coordinated effort, to place the ball, either by running or passing, into their opponents' end zone area. "Tackle football" differs from "Touch football" in that full contact blocking is used to aid the movement of the ball into an opponent's end zone. Tackling is generally the technique used by the defense to impede offensive progress.

BASIC RULES

1. The game shall consist of 60 minutes of actual playing time, divided into 4 quarters of 15 minutes each. For players at the high school level or lower, it is customary that the game consist of 48 minutes of actual playing time, divided into 4 quarters of 12 minutes each. However, depending on the age of the players, league officials might adopt different playing times.
2. The game is started by an opening kickoff and subsequent play is initiated from the point where the ball is "grounded" or where the receiving team's ball carrier is tackled. For simplicity sake, a tackle is defined as having the forward progress of the ball carrier stopped by the defense, forcing one knee to the ground.
3. The number of on-field officials supervising the game proceedings can vary from 3 to 6, depending on local league by-laws.
4. Points for scoring are awarded on the following basis:
 - Touchdown: Run or pass the ball into opponent's end zone - 6 points.
 - Field Goal: The ball is place kicked between the goal post uprights, over the cross bar from anywhere on the field - 3 points.
 - Safety Touch: If the ball becomes dead in the end zone after having been carried, passed, or kicked from the field of play into their own end zone by the offensive team. - 2 points.
 - "Rouge": When the ball becomes dead in the possession of a team in its own end zone, or goes out of bounds in its end zone, as a result of a kick into the end zone by the opponent - 1 point.
 - Convert: Following a touchdown, a team may attempt to add to its score by place kicking the ball between the goal post uprights - 1 point, or by passing or carrying the ball into the end zone - 2 points.

5 .A legal offensive play may begin when a) At least 7 players are on the line of scrimmage and the five interior players are stationary for one second prior to the snap of the ball.

b) No more than 12 players on the field of play. (Some leagues, depending on the age of the players will have less than 12 players per side ... 6, 9 and 10 players per side are common alternatives to 12 players per side.)

c) The ball is put in play by “snapping” the ball between the legs of a player (the centre) in one continuous motion to the hands of another player (the Quarterback).

6. No player from either team may encroach on the one yard “neutral zone” between teams until the ball is snapped. The one yard “neutral zone” is measured from the nose of the football closest to the opponent’s end zone.

7. A team has 20 seconds to put the ball into play, once the official has spotted the ball. (Depending on the age of the players and their calibre of play, the time may be extended ... league by-law.)

8. The team in possession of the ball has 3 attempts or “downs” to gain 10 yards. It may advance the ball by carrying it, kicking it or throwing it. If the required distance is gained, the downs begin again. Failure to gain 10 yards in 3 downs results in the ball being awarded to the opponents.

9. Blocking an opponent from the rear – and in some instances below the waist – holding, and grabbing a defensive player is illegal.

10. Tackling an opponent by intentionally making contact with the helmet or face mask is illegal ... as is tackling an opponent around the head by grabbing the face mask or straight arm tackle to the head “clotheslining”.

11. Objectionable conduct is defined as:

- the use of profane, obscene or insulting language or gestures
- unsportsmanlike actions like throwing the ball at an opponent or official
- a tactic employed to delay or hinder the smooth operation of the game. There is no place for objectionable conduct by any member of a football team, player or coach!

All coaches are to become familiar, as quickly as possible, with the rules as they apply to the players that they coach ... and over time they should know all the rules that ensure the safety of all players.

BASIC OFFENSIVE POSITIONS

Offense:

The basic objective of a team is to move the ball into the opponent's end zone to score a touchdown or "major" score. This may be done by a combination of running or passing the ball downfield. Teams which depend equally on the run and the pass are referred to as "balanced" in their attack and are normally more difficult to defend.

Some teams, because of the talent of their players or the offensive philosophy, rely more heavily on either the run or passing attack. Those teams that use a high percentage of running or short passes are said to employ a "ball control" strategy. The goal is to obtain a series of first-downs, thus advancing the ball progressively towards the opponent's goal area. This style of play has the advantage of controlling the ball and thus keeping the opponent's offensive team off the field, while consuming time. The disadvantage of this strategy is that it is difficult to score quickly when behind in the game and time is running out. Another strategy employed by offensive teams is to attempt to score as quickly as possible. This less conservative approach is a more wide open style of play featuring the passing game. The object is to move the ball quickly downfield into scoring position. As opposed to the "ball control" strategy, this style of play generally has greater risk of a "turnover" (loss of possession of the ball) but allows the offensive team to score quickly if behind late in the game.

BASIC DEFENSIVE POSITIONS

Defence:

The major goal of the defending team is to prevent the easy touchdown. Some teams use a "bend, but don't break" approach, which gives up the short gains but attempts to prevent the long quick score. This strategy hopes that the offensive team will eventually fail to execute its offensive plays, giving the ball up on downs, or turning the ball over to the defence on a fumble or interception, or forcing a punt prior to reaching the goal line. This defensive strategy requires patience on the part of the defensive players.

Defensive strategies that attempt to force the offensive teams to make mistakes by rushing many players on the line of scrimmage are said to employ an "attacking" posture or style of play. This strategy hopes that the offensive timing can be disrupted causing errors in play execution (fumbles, tackling the ball carrier behind the line of scrimmage, forced interceptions), creating a quick turnover of the ball or loss in confidence. This style of defence features lots of "blitzing" (extra players rush or penetrate the line of scrimmage), and relies more heavily on man-to-man pass defence on eligible pass receivers. The disadvantage of this style of play is that it is more susceptible to the quick score if an individual player, covering an eligible pass receiver, makes an error in coverage or slips and falls down.