

FOOTBALL DEFINITIONS

A

all-purpose yardage

The sum of all yards gained by a player who is in possession of the ball during a play. All-purpose yardage 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.

attempt

1. A pass attempt
2. A rush attempt; a carry
3. A kick

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 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. In the NFL and NCAA, the fouls include pass interference and all personal fouls. Under NFHS (high school) rules only roughing the snapper, holder, kicker, and passer are penalized with an automatic first down.

B

backward pass

A pass thrown backward. 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. If the pass is not completed, it is automatically ruled a fumble, which can be recovered by either team.

ball carrier

The player currently in possession of the football.

ball control

A strategy that is based on low-risk plays in an effort to avoid losing possession of the ball most often when a team is protecting a lead late in a game.

Black Monday

The first working day following the final Sunday of the National Football League season (week 17) in which unsuccessful coaches and administration are typically fired or resign their position. The term is also attributed to the day following the annual NFL Draft where players' contracts may be terminated once new players are added to a roster.

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 opponent's backfield. If an additional linebacker is sent, bringing the total number of rushers to five, it is a blitz.

block

The act of one player obstructing another player with their body, either to push the opponent back or to prevent them moving beyond the blocker.

blocking sled

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

bomb

A long, distinctly arching pass.

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 high-risk variation of this play when the quarterback has no blockers.

bust

Term often used to refer to a player, usually one drafted early on the first day of the NFL draft, who failed to meet the expectations of the drafting team.

busted play

A play which deteriorates to the point that it no longer conforms with the coach's playbook and leads to confusion or chaos on the field.

C

carry or 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 (C)

A player position on offense. The center usually snaps the ball.

chain

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

chip shot

A very short field goal, usually of 25 yards or less, that is almost certain to be successful. Named after the golf term of the same name, for the ball's high and short trajectory.

chop block

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

clipping

A penalty called for an illegal block in which the blocked player is hit from behind at or below the waist; the penalty is 15 yards. Originally, clipping was defined as any block to 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.

clock management

The use of the rules of the game to manipulate the starting and stopping of the game clock to the team's advantage, usually near the end of the game.

coffin corner

The corner of the field of play between the end zone and the 10 yard line. A punter, if they are 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.

completion percentage

The percentage of passes completed from passes attempted.

contain

A defensive assignment. On outside runs such as a 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.

cornerback

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, and to contain the rusher on rushing plays.

D₁

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 stop the play before it begins and some do not. A dead ball foul that does not stop play cannot be declined.

dead zone

Also known as "four-down territory;" a spot on the field outside of a kicker's field goal range but close enough to the opposing end zone that a punt will likely result in a touchback.

defensive back

A cornerback or safety position on the defensive team; commonly defends against wide receivers. Generally there are four defensive backs playing at a time; but see nickel back and dime back.

defensive end

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.

defensive tackle

A player position on defense on the inside of the defensive line and whose principal function is to contain the run. A defensive tackle who lines up directly across from the center is known as a "nose tackle", often the heaviest player on the defense. A defensive tackle who lines up between an offensive guard and offensive tackle is known as a "three-gap technique tackle".

defensive team

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

delay of game

A five-yard foul which occurs when the offensive team does not put the ball in play before the play clock runs out.

dime back

The second extra, or sixth total, defensive back. Named because a dime has the same value as two nickels.

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. A first down occurs after a change of possession of the ball, after advancing the ball 10 yards following a previous first down and after certain penalties.

down by contact

When the player carrying the ball touches the ground with any part of his body other than the feet, hands, or arms as a direct result of contact with a player of the opposing team. In professional football a player must be *down by contact* in order for play to stop; if they trip and fall without being touched by an opposing player they are free to get up and continue advancing the ball. Exceptions to this rule that result in play stopping include when the player carrying the ball is on the ground but not downed by contact (e.g., after tripping and falling) and is touched by a member of the opposing team while still on the ground; or when the player with the ball *intentionally* kneels down on the ground and stops advancing, e.g. a quarterback kneel or touchback.

drive

A continuous set of offensive plays gaining substantial yardage and several first downs, usually leading to a scoring opportunity.

E

eligible receiver

A player who may legally touch a forward pass. On the offense, these are: the ends, backs, and (except in the NFL) one player in position to take a hand-to-hand snap; provided the player's jersey displays a number in the

ranges allowed for eligible receivers. All players of the opposing team are eligible receivers, and once the ball is touched by a player of the opposing team, all players become eligible.

encroachment

An illegal action by a defensive player crossing the line of scrimmage and making 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 receiver motions into the backfield as the ball is snapped to take the handoff and runs around the opposite end from where they lined up.

end zone

The area between the end line and the goal line, bounded by the sidelines.

extra point

A single point scored after a touchdown. The team's kicker kicks through the goal post from a certain distance.

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

A foul (resulting in a five-yard penalty) in which an offensive player moves before the ball is snapped, potentially drawing defensive players offside.

fair catch

An unhindered catch of an opponent's kick. The player wanting to make a fair catch must signal for a fair catch by waving an arm overhead while the ball is in the air. After that signal, once the ball is possessed, it is dead immediately and opponents will receive a 15-yard penalty for any contact with the receiver.

fantasy football

A game in which the participants (called "owners") each draft on their own or with the aid of software^[9] a team of real-life NFL players and then score points based on those players' statistical performance on the field.

field judge

The official traditionally in charge of timekeeping

field goal

A score of three points made by team's kicker - kicking the ball through the opponent's goal. A missed field goal can be returned as a punt, if recovered in-bounds by the defending team.

field position

A relative measure of how many yards a team must travel in order to score.

first down

The first of a set of four downs. Usually, a team which has a first down needs to advance the ball ten yards to receive another first down, but penalties or field position (i.e. less than ten 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. Also the weighted red flag that an NFL head coach throws onto the field to alert officials that they are challenging a call on the field.

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. Running backs often run pass routes to the flat when they are the safety valve receiver.

flea flicker

A trick play in which a running back throws a backward pass back to the quarterback, who then throws a pass to a wide receiver or tight end.

formation

An arrangement of the offensive skill players. A formation usually is described in terms of how the running backs line up (e.g. *I* formation, which refers to the situation where the halfback is lined up about seven yards deep, and the fullback is lined up about five 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).

forward progress

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

fourth down

The final of a set of four downs. 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 on fourth down or attempt a field goal if they are close enough to do so.

fourth down conversion

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.

four-down territory

A period of time, late in the fourth quarter, where a team that is on offense but trailing cannot afford to surrender possession, since the defense will not realistically be able to stop the offense with enough time remaining to score enough points to tie or take the lead before the game ends. During such a time, an offensive team will attempt fourth-down conversions in situations when it would otherwise be too risky to do so seriously.

four-point stance

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

free play

When the defense commits a foul at the time of the snap (usually an offside foul), the offense can play out the rest of the play and either take the five-yard penalty and replay the down or the result of the play, whichever is more advantageous. Thus, the offense can afford to take greater risks on that play.

free safety (FS)

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 receiver and run support responsibilities).

fullback

A player position on offense. Originally, lined up deep behind the quarterback in the *T* formation. In modern formations 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 accidentally lost possession of; in Canadian football the term includes muffs.

G

goal line

The line at the beginning 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 very near the goal line

guard

Two of the five offensive line positions.

gunner

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 receivers near or in 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. The term was first used during Roger Staubach's comeback victory in which he threw such a pass to Drew Pearson to defeat the Minnesota Vikings in a divisional round playoff game in 1975. The term refers to the Catholic prayer.

halfback

A player position on offense - a type of running back

hand-off

A move in which a player transfers the ball to another player, and the receiving player takes possession of the ball before it leaves the hands of the giver (thus the ball is never in flight). A handoff can occur in any direction. Sometimes called a "switch" in touch football.

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 10-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 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 or a timeout.

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.

hike

Synonym of "snap" – the handoff or pass from the center that begins a play from scrimmage

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 their 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)

hook and lateral

A trick play in which a receiver (usually 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 receiver or a running back) going in a different direction.

horse-collar

A horse-collar is a type of tackle made by grabbing the back-inside of an opponent's shoulder pads or jersey. This type of tackle was banned in the NFL in 2005 and in college football in 2008.

huddle

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

hurry-up offense

An offensive strategy designed to gain yardage 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

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 player may be in motion but cannot be going forward at the time of the snap (except in arena and Canadian football where one player is allowed to do so), and a lineman must be set for one second before the snap. Otherwise, it is an illegal motion.

illegal shift

On offense, only one person is allowed to be in pre-snap motion after the formation is set. A second person may go in motion after the first has come to a set position for one second. If these conditions are not met when sending people into motion, an illegal shift has occurred.

incomplete pass

A forward pass of the ball which no eligible offensive player caught. Interceptions are counted as incompletions.

ineligible 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.

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 avoiding 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.

interception

Catching of a forward pass thrown by an opposing quarterback.

K

kick

A punt, place kick, or drop kick

kicker

Player who specializes in placekicking (i.e. field goals and kick offs). In rare cases, the placekicker solely handles field goals while a kickoff specialist handles kickoffs.

kickoff

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 quarterback in possession of the ball kneels down after receiving the snap, ending the play while keeping the clock

running. This is done to end the game sooner without needing to run a riskier play. The player kneeling is said to "take a knee", and thus is "taking a knee" or "taking the knee".

L

leg whip

An illegal block or tackle using the legs to trip an opponent

line of scrimmage

The imaginary line that the offensive team must stay behind before the hike of the ball.

linebacker

A player position on defense. The linebackers typically play one to six yards behind the defensive linemen (DLs) and are the most versatile players on defense because they can defend both run and pass plays or be called to blitz. There are two types of LB: middle linebacker (MLB) and outside linebacker (OLB).

lineman

A defensive or offensive position on the line of scrimmage.

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.

M

man in motion

A player on offense who is moving backwards or parallel to the line of scrimmage at the snap. In American football, only one offensive player can be in motion at a time, cannot be moving toward the line of scrimmage at the snap, and may not be a player who is on the line of scrimmage.

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 coverages.

motion

The ordered movement of eligible receivers prior to the snap. Motion can be used to cause mismatches. Another use for motion is to enhance the pre-snap read of the defensive coverage.

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

National Football League

The largest professional American football league, with 32 teams split into two conferences (National and American) and four divisions each (North, West, East and South).

neutral zone

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

NFL

The National Football League

nickel back

An extra, or fifth, defensive back. Named after the five-cent coin. Popularized by the Miami Dolphins in the 1970s, now common. Used in situations where a forward pass is expected.

no-huddle offense

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

nose tackle

A tackle in a three-man defensive line who lines up opposite the center. 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 (11 guys on the field)

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 in play. 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 running back in the backfield with the quarterback. Other eligible receivers are near the line of scrimmage.

onside kick

A play in which the kicking team tries to recover the kicked ball before the opposing team.

option offense

P

PAT

Point after touchdown.

pass

An action performed by a player, using their arm to transfer the ball to another player by throwing the ball through the air between them. Every pass is classified as either a forward pass or a lateral pass, depending on the direction the ball travels.

pass interference

Also "passing interference" or "PI"; when a player illegally hinders an eligible receiver's, or a defender's opportunity to catch a forward pass.

pass protection

The use of pass blocking by the offensive line, tight ends and various backs to protect the quarterback from being sacked, and to allow the QB time and space to throw the ball.

passer rating

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

passing yards

Also "pass yards", "passing yardage", and "yards passing"; the distance in total yards from scrimmage that a passer has thrown the football plus the distance any receivers have run after catching the ball. Passing yards do not include incomplete throws, nor is the actual distance the ball travels through the air measured, as it is measured in flat yards along one direction of the field, always starting from the line of scrimmage and ending at the point that the receiver is ruled down. If the receiver reaches the end zone and scores a touchdown, then the yardage measurement ends at the opposing team's goal line (the zero-yard line).

pick

An interception of a pass

place kick

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

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 five yard delay of game foul. Currently, the NFL uses 40 seconds (25 seconds after a time out or other administrative stoppage).

pocket

The area on the offensive side of the line of scrimmage between the two offensive tackles, where the pass blockers attempt to prevent the defensive players from reaching the quarterback during passing plays.

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 receiving team to return the ball.

possession

Physical control of the ball after a pass or fumble

post pattern

A passing route in which the receiver sprints eight to ten yards, fakes a look back at the quarterback, then sprints deep at an angle toward the middle of the field; the opposite pattern is the flag route.

pump fake

When the quarterback fakes a pass and keeps the ball in their 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. Alternatively, they can signal for a fair catch or allow the ball to go into the end zone for a touchback.

punter

A kicker who specializes in punting as opposed to place kicking

Q

quarter

One of four periods of play in a standard American football game. A quarter lasts for 15 game clock minutes. A tie at the end of four quarters results in overtime.

quarterback

An offensive player who lines up behind the center, and takes the snap.

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.

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. Another name for a *catch*.

red flag

A weighted red marker thrown onto the field by a coach to tell the officials that they want a certain play reviewed; sometimes referred to as a "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.

regular season

In NFL football, the regular season is defined as weeks 1–17, excluding the preseason or postseason.

return

The act of progressing the ball down the field after a change of possession, such as a kick or interception

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 running back 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. This is slightly different from 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.

running back

A player position on offense. Although the term usually refers to a halfback or tailback, fullbacks are also considered running backs.

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 kneels.

running play

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

rush

An attempt to tackle or hurry the quarterback before they can throw a pass or make a kick

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 quarterback who intends to throw a forward pass.

safety

1. A player position on defense.
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. After a safety, the team that was scored upon must kick the ball to the scoring team from its own 20-yard line.

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.

screen pass

A short forward pass to a receiver who has blockers in front. The receiver in this play is usually a running back, although wide receiver and tight end screens are also used. Although they are both called screen passes, the wide receiver screen and the running back screen are used for very different reasons. In the case of a running back 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 running back screen. The wide receiver screen is a much faster developing play, designed to catch the defense off guard.

secondary

Refers to the defensive "backfield", specifically the safeties and cornerbacks. Primarily responsible for pass coverage defense.

series

A sequence of downs, beginning with a first down and including all subsequent downs until a new first down, score, or change of possession. A typical drive consists of multiple series.

shift

When two or more offensive players move at the same time before the snap. All players who move in a shift must come to a complete stop prior to the snap.

shotgun formation

A formation in which the quarterback receives the snap 5-8 yards behind the center.

side zone

The area between a hash mark and a sideline

slant

A receiver route. In the slant route, a receiver runs straight upfield a few yards, plants their outside foot hard while in full stride, and turns 45 degrees towards the quarterback.

slot

The area between a split end and the rest of the offensive line. A pass 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.

special teams

The units that handle kickoffs, punts, free kicks and field goal attempts. Often made up of 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. 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.

spiral

The continuous lateral rotation of the football following its release from the hand of a passer or punter. It is often described in terms of tightness; a *tight spiral* is one where the endpoints of the ball continuously stay on the trajectory of the pass without wobbling throughout the pass or punt.

starter

A player who is the first to play their position within a given game or season. Depending on the position and the game situation, a starter 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 running-back may start the game but share time with another running back in specific situations or to provide the opportunity for rest during the game.

stiff-arm

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

strong safety

A kind of safety on defense, as opposed to a free safety. This is a central defensive back; originally, the term indicated the lining up on the strong side of the field and covering 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 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, assuming a balanced line. If the offense uses an unbalanced line, the strong side is the side with the most linemen.

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, ideally using the player as a pick to get free from blockers.

sweep

A running play in which several blockers lead a running back 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

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 lineman.*

tailback

Player position on offense farthest ("deepest") back, except in kicking formations. Also often referred to as the *running back*, particularly in a one-back offense.

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

tight end

A player position on offense, often known as *Y receiver*, 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.

time of possession (TOP)

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 as it usually means the opponent's defense becomes fatigued and easier to gain yardage on late in games. 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). Teams that have a big disadvantage in the time of possession usually give up several third down conversions or frequently go three-and-out on offense.

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 in most situations.

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.

turn the ball over on downs

When a team uses all four 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-minute warning

A free time out given to both teams when there are two minutes left on the game clock in each half. Certain leagues use different times for this warning.

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.

U

under center

Refers to the quarterback lining up directly behind the center to take the snap. The person under center is considered ineligible in the NFL.

utility player

A player capable of playing multiple positions

W

waived/injured

Before NFL rosters are reduced to 55 players for the regular season, any injured non-vested veteran (defined as a player with less than four years of experience) has to be placed on waivers before being placed on injured reserve. If the waived/injured player is not claimed by another team, then they are placed on the injured reserve of the team that waived them. Once rosters are reduced to 55-players, non-vested veterans can be placed on injured reserve without having to be placed on waivers.

West Coast offense

An offensive philosophy that uses short, high-percentage passes as the core of a ball-control offense.

wide receiver

X_[edit]

X-receiver

Y

YAC

1. *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.
2. *Yards after contact* – the amount of yardage gained by an offensive player after the first defensive player makes contact

yard line

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

yardage

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

yards from scrimmage

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

Z

zone defense

A defense in which players are in pass-coverage zones of the field, instead of covering 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.