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7th Edition

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**Howie Long**

Pro Football Hall of Famer

**John Czarnecki**

Hall of Fame Selector and Longtime  
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**by Howie Long with John Czarnecki**

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## Football For Dummies®, 7th Edition

Published by: **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**, 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774, [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com)

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Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2023935523

ISBN 978-1-394-18126-1 (pbk); ISBN 978-1-394-18128-5 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-394-18127-8 (ebk)

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# Introduction

Millions of people across the United States are intrigued by football — all types and levels of it. These people may have friends or family who have made the football season a ritual, from the last weekend in August through the college bowl games in December until Super Bowl Sunday at the start of February. To be a part of that experience, you need to have a working knowledge of the game.

*Football For Dummies, 7th Edition*, serves to give you that knowledge and help you better facilitate interaction with your friends, family, or whomever you watch football with. For many people, on the surface, football seems to be a complicated game. Twenty-two players are on the field at one time, plus a number of officials. The intricacies of first down, second down, and third down, and everything from how many offensive linemen there are to what the quarterback really does or doesn't do, all need to be explained and simplified. This book will help; that's why I decided to write it.

I think football is far less intimidating when you have a basic working knowledge of the game. After you break through that initial fear of being overwhelmed by football and what you don't understand, everything else about the game falls into place. You begin to see the game clearly, like when you wipe the early morning dew off your windshield — suddenly everything becomes crystal clear.

Today I know a lot more about the game as a whole than I did when I was a player. I played in high school and in college, plus I played for 13 seasons in the National Football League (NFL). But being a television analyst — 2023 will be my 30th season working for FOX Sports — has forced me to learn even more about this game that I love.

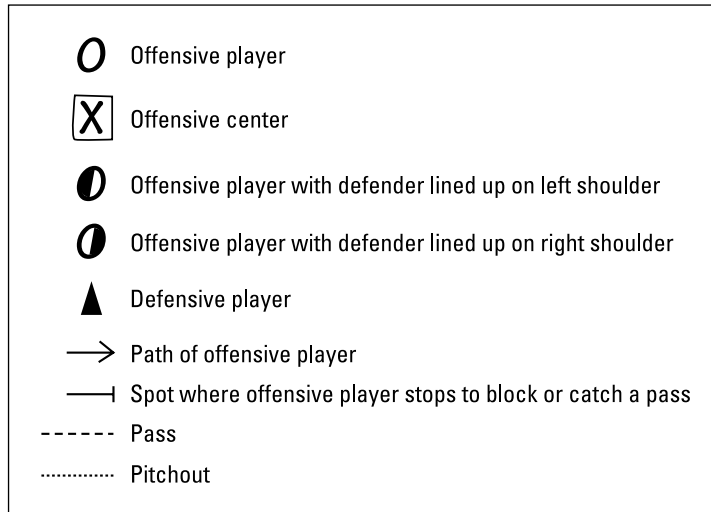
As a player, I had a working knowledge of the passing game, of how a secondary works in coverages, and of the offensive and defensive line formations. I also had a working knowledge of general managers, scouts, and head coaches. But working as an analyst, I've been forced to cover the entire game. I no longer view football from a defensive lineman's perspective. Instead, I look at football as a whole. And I'm still learning every day. That never changes. I don't think you'll ever stop learning when it comes to football. It's the same for everyone — the players, the fans, the coaches, and the television experts. So don't feel alone out there.

# About This Book

I wrote *Football For Dummies*, 7th Edition, to help you find out what you want to know about football. Therefore, I don't expect you to read every single page in order. Sure, you can read the book from front to back if you want, but if you'd rather skip around and just read about the topics that interest you, that's fine, too.

And I don't make you remember obscure facts from earlier chapters to make sense of later chapters. If you need to know something that I cover in an earlier chapter, I either define it again or refer you to the chapter that contains the information. Also, if you don't know certain football jargon, you can turn to the appendix, which explains some of the most common terms. What could be simpler?

I also use diagrams — you know, the famous “Xs and Os” — to show you what I'm talking about when I describe lineups, formations, and plays. So that you aren't left wondering what all those little symbols mean, here's a key to the diagrams used in this book:



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## Foolish Assumptions

Here's what I'm assuming about you: You're interested in football and want to get familiar with the sport, including its history, so that you can watch games in person and on television, follow all the action, and enjoy football games to the hilt.

You may not know much about football, but I know that you're no dummy either. You may, however, have burning questions like these:

- » Does it really matter how all those guys line up on the field?
- » Why do you get six points for a touchdown but only three points for a field goal?
- » Why is the quarterback shouting things like "Omaha" and "Kill Kill" over and over during a game?
- » Does it really mean something when the officials do those funny signals with their arms?

This book answers all these questions and more.

## Icons Used in This Book

To help you navigate your way through this book, I place icons in the margins. These little pictures point you to a particular type of information. Here's a list of the icons in this book and what they mean:



HALL OF  
FAME

A book about football wouldn't be the same without tales of the sport's greats. This icon flags stories about the game's greatest, most recognized players.



HOWIE  
SAYS

Being a commentator, I can't help but want to throw in my two cents once in a while. When I have my own tale to tell on a subject, I mark it with this icon.



REMEMBER

When you see this icon, you know you're reading a piece of information that's especially important to remember. If you take away nothing else from this book but the paragraphs flagged with this icon, you'll have a solid understanding of football.



TIP

Look for this icon if you want to know all the helpful tidbits of info that can make you a more informed fan.

# Beyond the Book

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This book provides great information to help you learn about football, but you can find additional resources on [Dummies.com](http://Dummies.com). You can download the book's Cheat Sheet at [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com). Just type "Football For Dummies cheat sheet" in the Search box. It's a handy resource to keep on your computer, tablet, or smartphone.

# Where to Go from Here

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So you're geared up and ready to play, metaphorically speaking. Where you go from here depends on the type of information you're looking for. If you want a primer on football starting at square one, head to Chapter 1. If you want to know about how a particular phase of the game — say, the offensive line or the kicking game — works, head to that specific chapter. And if you want to read about some of the greatest players in football history, head to Part 6. Wherever you start, enjoy the game!

# 1

## Getting Started with Football

### **IN THIS PART . . .**

Get an overview of football's history, the players and personnel involved, and the roots of the world's greatest game.

Look at the field and equipment and the meanings behind the uniforms.

Review the rules of football and understand its ins and outs.



## IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Discovering why football is America's passion
- » Looking back on football's progression throughout the years
- » Figuring out how the modern football season works
- » Recognizing what makes college games so much fun and the Super Bowl such a major event

# Chapter 1

# America's Greatest Game

**W**hen I was 14, a sophomore in high school, I moved out of Boston to live with my uncle. During my first weekend in Milford, Massachusetts, I saw my first high school football game. I had never seen anything like it. Before the game, an antique fire engine led a parade on the track around the football field while the crowd clapped and cheered. The players then thundered across a wooden bridge over a pond and burst through a banner to enter the stadium. I said to myself, "Wow, this game is for me."

I wasn't necessarily drawn to the game itself; I simply loved what came with the sport: *respect*. For me, football was an opportunity to belong to something, giving me confidence for the first time in my life. It was more of a personal thing than it was about playing football. It wasn't so much the football but what football did for me. Football gave me a sense of self-worth, which I've carried with me throughout my life.

Sure, I experienced down periods when I first started playing, but I never thought about quitting. My first high school coach, Dick Corbin, was great to me and

encouraged me to continue playing the game. Believe me, coaches are important. I've always had the support of football coaches, both on *and* off the field.

Football is responsible for everything that I've accomplished. The discipline and hard work that made me a successful athlete have helped me in other areas of my life, allowing me to venture into new careers in movies and television.

## Why Football Is the Best

Baseball may be America's pastime, but football is America's passion. Football is the only team sport in America that conjures up visions of Roman gladiators, pitting city versus city, state versus state — sometimes with a Civil War feel, like when the Jets play the Giants in New York or the Dallas Cowboys play their long-time rivals from Washington, D.C.

Football is played in all weather conditions — snow, rain, and sleet — with temperatures on the playing field ranging from  $-30$  to  $120$  degrees Fahrenheit. Whatever the conditions may be, the game goes on. And unlike other major sports, the football playoff system, in the National Football League (NFL) anyway, is a single-elimination tournament. In other words, the NFL has no playoff series; the playoffs are do-or-die, culminating in what has become the single biggest one-day sporting event in America: the Super Bowl.

Or, in simpler terms, anytime you stick 22 men in high-tech plastic helmets on a football field and have them continually run great distances at incredible speeds and slam into each other, people will watch.

Football has wedged itself into American culture. In fact, in many small towns across the United States, the centerpiece is the Friday night high school football game. The NFL doesn't play on Fridays simply to protect this great part of Americana, in which football often gives schools and even towns a certain identity. For example, hard-core fans know that tiny Massillon, Ohio, is where the late, great Paul Brown of the Cleveland Browns began his coaching career. To this day, Massillon's high school has maintained a tremendous high school football tradition. With so many factions of the student body involved, plus their families, a strong core of fans is built. For many, this enthusiasm for football continues in college.

Millions of people are familiar with the strategy of the game, and most of them pass it down through their families. A lot of fathers coach their sons, and, increasingly these days, their daughters. Although the focus may have changed in today's society, at one time the only team that mattered in high school was the football team. The pace of the game — stoppage after every play with a huddle — is perfect for most fans because it allows them time to guess what the team will try next.

## FOOTBALL IS *IT* IN THE UNITED STATES

Since 1937, the analytics company Gallup has been conducting polls to determine which sport is the most popular in the United States. Football has been ranked number one in every single poll since 1972. For over a half-century, between roughly 30 and 45 percent of Americans polled chose football as their favorite sport to watch. Whether you measure by TV ratings, stadium attendance figures, or total revenue, football is unquestionably the most popular spectator sport in the United States.



TIP

On two particular holidays, sitting down and watching football has become an American tradition:

- » **Thanksgiving Day** is reserved for a turkey dinner with the family, followed by a pro football game. The Detroit Lions started the tradition in 1934, and they continue to play a game every Thanksgiving. There have been at least two pro football games on Thanksgiving Day every year since 1960, with the Dallas Cowboys also traditionally hosting a contest. And in 2006, a night game was added to cap off the holiday.
- » **New Year's Day** has long been the day for several college football bowl games, which generally match up some of the nation's finest teams.

## Who's Playing Football

Football is suited to all sizes of athletes. Larger athletes generally play on the offensive and defensive lines — what are called the *trenches*. Leaner athletes who are faster and quicker generally play the skill positions, such as quarterback, running back, and receiver. But no matter how big or how talented you are, you must have inner courage to play football. This game requires strength and perseverance. If you don't believe you're tough enough to play, then you probably shouldn't try.

And if you're not up to the full-force-hitting variety of football, you can still enjoy the sport as a player. Touch football is totally different from tackle football. All you need are a ball and maybe six players, three per team. Anyone can play this game, and the players decide the rules and the size of the field at the start of the game. I've seen people playing touch football on the streets of New York City and in parks and on front lawns all across America — the beauty of the game is that you can play anywhere.



Of all the team sports, football is the most violent and dangerous, with hockey a distant second. I played football for respect, and I believe that it builds character. Considering some of the problems in society today, football can give a youngster's life some structure and can also teach discipline. All the players who belong to a football team are in the struggle together, sharing in the joy and the pain of the sport. Every play can be such an adrenaline rush.

## How Football Began

Just as many fans get caught up in the hype and hoopla of today's NFL, many others love the game for its sense of tradition. The game itself has endured for more than 150 years.

Games involving kicking a ball into a goal on a lined field have existed for more than 2,000 years. American football evolved from two particular games that were popular in other parts of the world: soccer (as it's known in the United States) and rugby. Both the Romans and the Spartans (remember that movie *Spartacus*? Now those guys were tough!) played some version of soccer. Soccer and rugby came to North America in the 19th century, and historians have noted that the first form of American football emerged on November 6, 1869, when teams from Princeton and Rutgers, two New Jersey universities, competed in a game of what was closer to rugby than football. Rutgers won that game 6–4.

The following sections introduce you to the contributions of two key individuals in the football world: Walter Camp and Harold “Red” Grange.

### Camp defines the rules



Walter Camp, a sensational player at Yale University and a driving force behind many football rules, is known as the father of American football. Around 1876, when football was already being played at universities on the East Coast and in Canada, Camp helped write the game's first rules. In 1880, he authored rules that reduced the number of players per team from 15 to 11 (today's total) and replaced the rugby scrum with the center snap to put the ball in play. (In a *scrum*, players from both sides bunch tightly together, butting heads while the ball is thrown between them. The players then try to gain possession of the ball with their feet. Using your hands to gain possession is unique to American football — both rugby and soccer forbid it.)

Camp also championed the rule that a team needed to gain 5 yards in three plays in order to maintain possession. Today, teams must gain 10 yards in four plays. (Head to Chapter 3 for more information about these and other rules.)

Camp devised plays and formations and instituted referees. However, his biggest proposal was tackling, which was introduced in 1888. *Tackling* — physically forcing a player to the ground— made the game more violent. It also popularized an offensive strategy known as the *flying wedge*, where an entire team (ten players) would mass in front of one ball carrier in the form of a wedge. Football was almost banned in 1906 after nearly 20 deaths (and many more serious injuries in the preceding season), but President Theodore Roosevelt saved the game by convincing college representatives to initiate stricter rules to make the game less brutal and dangerous.



REMEMBER

Football has been cleaned up a great deal over the years and has come a long way from clothesline shots and quarterbacks taking late hits and direct blows to the head. But let's not kid one another: Football is a high-impact collision sport, and with collision comes pain and injury. Even with the rules being adjusted to protect today's quarterbacks, rarely does a Monday morning come without the news that at least one quarterback sustained a concussion. Players are bigger, faster, and stronger than ever before. Although technological advances to equipment (and a better awareness of the physical toll the game takes) strive to make the sport safer, football will always be inherently dangerous.

## Grange helps spread the popularity of pro ball

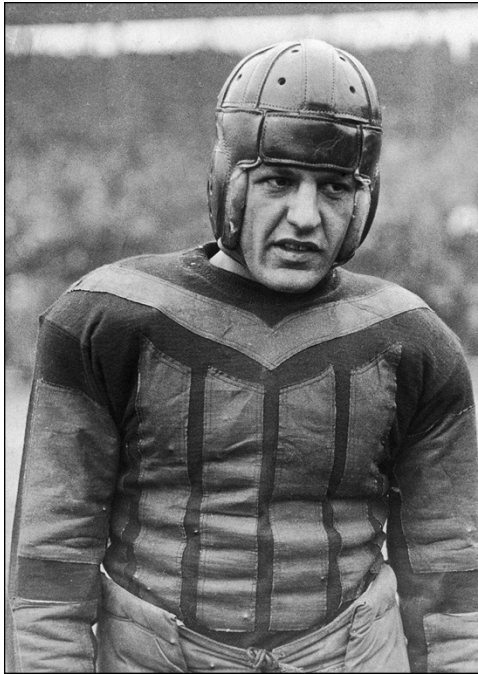
Americans started playing football in colleges and on club teams in the 1870s. Football became a source of identity for collegians and a regular Saturday afternoon activity by the turn of the century.

In the first 90 years of football, college football was far more popular than pro football; it was (and still is, at many schools) all about tradition and the many rivalries between colleges. Ninety years ago, having more than 50,000 fans attend a great college game wasn't unusual. During that same period, games in the NFL, which officially began in 1920, were fortunate to draw 5,000 fans.



HALL OF  
FAME

Two days after the 1925 college season ended, Illinois All-American halfback Harold “Red” Grange (see Figure 1-1) signed a contract to play with the struggling Chicago Bears. On Thanksgiving Day of that year, 36,000 fans — the largest crowd in pro football history at that time — watched Grange and the Bears play the league's top team, the Chicago Cardinals, to a scoreless tie in Cubs Park (now called Wrigley Field, the home of the Chicago Cubs baseball team). The Bears went on to play a barnstorming tour, and in New York's Polo Grounds, more than 73,000 fans watched Grange — nicknamed “the Galloping Ghost” — compete against the New York Giants. Although Grange did attract new fans to the pro game, fewer than 30,000 fans attended championship games in the early 1930s.



**FIGURE 1-1:**  
Harold “Red”  
Grange, known as  
“the Galloping  
Ghost,” played for  
the Chicago Bears  
in 1925.

*Photo credit: © New York Times Co./Getty Images*

Pro football emerged as an equal to college football after its games began being televised nationally in the 1960s, but it took decades for the NFL to supplant college football. And to this day, many colleges have as much fan support as some NFL franchises. University powerhouses such as Ohio State, USC, Alabama, and Notre Dame can claim more fans than, say, the Atlanta Falcons or Jacksonville Jaguars.



HALL OF  
FAME

## FOOTBALL IMMORTALS

With every sport comes a list of immortals — those great players who nurtured the game and made it what it is today. The following are some of the early legends of American football:

- **John W. Heisman:** The annual award given to the nation’s best college player — the Heisman Trophy — is named after this Brown University (and later University of Pennsylvania) player. Heisman was an early advocate of the forward pass.
- **Fritz Pollard:** Pollard starred for Brown University in 1915 and 1916 and was the first Black player to appear in the Rose Bowl. He’s also considered the first Black