FLASHFEED STUDY GUIDE

American Football Trivia & Gridiron Lore

Study guide by FlashFeed

November 2026 edition · pack version 1.1.9

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American Football Trivia & Gridiron Lore: study guide

Football from the Rutgers-Princeton game and the AFL-NFL merger through record-setters Emmitt Smith, Walter Payton and Jerry Rice, Hail Mary finishes and defensive greats like Lawrence Taylor, to Heisman lore and college traditions.

Edition	November 2026 (2026-11-21)
Pack version	1.1.9
Contents	6 lessons · 324 cards in the app · 60 self-test questions · 47 pictures
In the app	flashfeedlearningapp.com/packs/american-football-trivia

How to use this guide

Take one lesson at a time: read the study guide, then go over any key facts. Where a lesson has a self-test, try it from memory before you check the answer key at the back. Follow the Go deeper links when you want more.

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Contents

01 Origins, Gridiron Pioneers, and Legendary Firsts 4

02 The Super Bowl Era and Iconic Championship Clashes 16

03 Legendary Quarterbacks, Gunslingers, and Field Generals 28

04 Record Breakers, Skill Position Icons, and Defensive Juggernauts 41

05 Bizarre Plays, Miracle Moments, and Iconic Football Lore 53

06 Strategy, Football Anatomy, College Traditions, and Tailgate Culture 66

Answer key 79

Sources 84

Image credits 86

Useful links 89

About FlashFeed 90

LESSON 1 OF 6

Origins, Gridiron Pioneers, and Legendary Firsts

The Birth of the Gridiron: From Rutgers-Princeton to Canton · Pioneering Giants and Breakthrough Milestones

WHAT YOU'LL BE ABLE TO DO

- Recall the 1869 Rutgers-Princeton game, Walter Camp's rules, Heffelfinger's $500 pro payment, the 1906 forward pass, and Jim Thorpe's 1920 presidency.
- Recall football's pioneers: Fritz Pollard, Red Grange, Kenny Washington and Woody Strode's 1946 return, the Bears' 73-0 rout, and Paul Brown's film study.

Lesson 1: Origins, Gridiron Pioneers, and Legendary Firsts

The Birth of the Gridiron: From Rutgers-Princeton to Canton

The genesis of American football traces back to the late nineteenth century, when collegiate athletes modified English rugby and soccer into an entirely new, violent, and tactical sport. On November 6, 1869, Rutgers College and the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) met in New Brunswick, New Jersey, for what is universally recognized as the first intercollegiate football game. Played with a round ball and twenty-five players per side, Rutgers won 6-4 under rules resembling Association football.

The true transformation from chaotic scrum to structured gridiron tactical chess occurred under Walter Camp, a Yale undergraduate and medical student known as the Father of American Football. At Intercollegiate Football Association rules conventions between 1880 and 1883, Camp introduced foundational innovations: establishing the line of scrimmage, the snap from center to quarterback, an eleven-player per side limit, and the system of downs requiring teams to gain five yards (later ten in 1906) in three downs to maintain possession.

As the collegiate game surged in popularity across the Ivy League, professional athletics emerged in industrial Western Pennsylvania. In November 1892, former Yale All-American William 'Pudge' Heffelfinger accepted an unprecedented cash payment of $500 from the Allegheny Athletic Association to play against the rival Pittsburgh Athletic Club, becoming the first openly paid professional football player in history.

By 1905, football faced an existential crisis due to rampant brutality and mass-momentum plays descended from Lorin Deland's Harvard flying wedge (itself banned in 1894), which contributed to a string of player deaths (roughly 19 in 1905). President Theodore Roosevelt summoned collegiate leaders to the White House demanding immediate safety reforms, which catalyzed the legalization of the

forward pass in 1906 and the founding of the NCAA. Saint Louis University halfback Bradbury Robinson completed the first legal forward pass in September 1906.

Professional football reached institutional maturity on September 17, 1920, when representatives from ten teams gathered in Canton, Ohio, at Ralph Hay's Hupmobile auto showroom. There they formed the American Professional Football Association (APFA), electing Olympic icon Jim Thorpe as its first president. The Akron Pros became the first league champion, and in 1922 the organization renamed itself the National Football League (NFL).

Key Historical Concepts and Trivia Milestones

First Intercollegiate Game

On November 6, 1869, Rutgers College defeated Princeton 6-4 in New Brunswick, New Jersey, in the first intercollegiate football contest, played under modified soccer-style rules with 25 players on each side.

Walter Camp Innovations

Known as the Father of American Football, Walter Camp authored the fundamental rules between 1880 and 1883 that separated football from rugby: creating the line of scrimmage, the center snap, 11-man teams, and the system of downs.

First Professional Player

Former Yale guard William 'Pudge' Heffelfinger was paid $500 by the Allegheny Athletic Association on November 12, 1892, to play against the Pittsburgh Athletic Club, making him the first recorded professional football player.

Forward Pass Legalization

In 1906, collegiate rules committees legalized the forward pass to open up the field, reduce lethal mass momentum collisions, and eliminate dangerous interior scrums.

First Legal Forward Pass

In September 1906, Saint Louis University halfback Bradbury Robinson was credited with throwing the first legal forward pass in history, in a game against Carroll College; that first attempt fell incomplete, and a later throw to teammate Jack Schneider went for a touchdown.

Founding of the APFA/NFL

Representatives from ten football teams met on September 17, 1920, inside Ralph Hay's Hupmobile auto showroom in Canton, Ohio, to organize the American Professional Football Association (APFA), later renamed the NFL in 1922.

Jim Thorpe First President

Olympic gold medalist and Canton Bulldogs star Jim Thorpe was named the first president of the APFA in 1920 to lend instant national prestige and athletic credibility to the new league.

First APFA Champion

The Akron Pros posted an undefeated 8-0-3 record during the inaugural 1920 season and were awarded the Brunswick-Balke-Collender Cup as the league's first official champions.

First Official APFA Game

On October 3, 1920, the Dayton Triangles defeated the Columbus Panhandles 14-0 at Triangle Park in Dayton, Ohio, in the first game between two APFA member franchises, with Lou Partlow scoring the league's first touchdown.

NFL Official Name Change

On June 24, 1922, the American Professional Football Association officially adopted the name National Football League (NFL) to reflect its expanding nationwide footprint.

Packers Indian Packing Sponsorship

Curly Lambeau and George Whitney Calhoun founded the Green Bay Packers on August 11, 1919, reportedly securing about $500 from Lambeau's employer, the Indian Packing Company, to purchase uniforms and equipment.

Bears Origins as Decatur Staleys

The Chicago Bears began in 1920 as the Decatur Staleys, a company team founded by starch manufacturer A.E. Staley, who hired player-coach George Halas before transferring the franchise to Chicago in 1921.

1912 Field and Scoring Rules

In 1912, football rules committees shortened the playing field from 110 to 100 yards, added 10-yard end zones for forward passes, added a fourth down (four downs to gain 10 yards, instead of three), and increased the touchdown value to six points.

The Flying Wedge

Harvard chess enthusiast Lorin F. Deland devised the momentum-driven flying wedge formation in 1892, where locked blockers charged ahead of the ballcarrier; it was banned in 1894 after causing numerous catastrophic injuries.

Teddy Roosevelt Safety Summit

In October 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt summoned football representatives from Harvard, Yale, and Princeton to the White House, urging them to eliminate brutal violence in the game; the reform effort that followed produced the 1906 rule changes and the body that became the NCAA.

Pioneering Giants and Breakthrough Milestones

The 1920s and 1930s witnessed professional football evolving from a regional Midwestern attraction into a legitimate national enterprise, spearheaded by transcendental superstars, tactical revolutions, and historic integration milestones. In late 1925, University of Illinois All-American halfback Harold 'Red' Grange, known as 'The Galloping Ghost,' signed with George Halas's Chicago Bears immediately after his final collegiate game. Grange's barnstorming tour drew an estimated 65,000 to 73,000 fans to New York's Polo Grounds, single-handedly legitimizing professional football in major metropolitan media markets.

Pioneering African-American trailblazers made foundational marks during this era. Fritz Pollard, an All-American halfback from Brown University, played for the Akron Pros in 1920 and was named head coach in 1921, becoming the first Black head coach in NFL history. Although an unwritten color barrier excluded Black players from 1933 to 1945, dynamic halfback Kenny Washington and end Woody Strode re-integrated the NFL in 1946 with the Los Angeles Rams after the team leased the publicly owned Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. Simultaneously, Marion Motley and Bill Willis integrated Paul Brown's Cleveland Browns in the All-America Football Conference (AAFC).

Strategic and operational milestones redefined the league. In December 1932, a tie atop the standings forced the first impromptu playoff game, moved indoors to the Chicago Stadium on a dirt circus floor due to a blizzard. The success of this indoor clash inspired the NFL to establish official annual championship games, split into two geographic divisions in 1933, and write its own rulebook allowing forward passes from anywhere behind the line of scrimmage.

In 1936, Philadelphia Eagles co-owner Bert Bell instituted the first collegiate draft at Philadelphia's Ritz-Carlton Hotel to create competitive parity, selecting Heisman winner Jay Berwanger #1 overall. On December 8, 1940, George Halas's Bears humiliated the Washington Redskins 73-0 in the NFL Championship using Clark Shaughnessy's modernized T-formation, sparking a nationwide tactical revolution. The era culminated in the legendary 1958 NFL Championship Game, known as 'The Greatest Game Ever Played,' where Johnny Unitas led the Baltimore Colts past the New York Giants 23-17 in the first NFL championship game to go to sudden-death overtime, watched by an estimated 45 million television viewers.

Key Historical Concepts and Trivia Milestones

Red Grange Barnstorming Tour

College sensation Harold 'Red' Grange signed with the Chicago Bears in 1925 and embarked on a grueling 19-game barnstorming tour, drawing an estimated 65,000 to 73,000 spectators to New York's

Polo Grounds and establishing the NFL's commercial viability.

Fritz Pollard First Black Head Coach

Brown University All-American Fritz Pollard was named co-head coach of the Akron Pros in 1921, making him the first African-American head coach in NFL history.

Kenny Washington Re-integration

In 1946, the Los Angeles Rams signed former UCLA standouts Kenny Washington and Woody Strode, ending a 13-year unwritten league-wide color barrier that had excluded Black athletes since 1933.

1932 Indoor Playoff Game

Due to blizzard conditions in December 1932, the Chicago Bears and Portsmouth Spartans played the NFL's first tiebreaker playoff game indoors at Chicago Stadium on an 80-yard dirt field modified from a circus arena.

1933 NFL Rule Separation

In 1933, the NFL established its own distinct rulebook, moving goalposts to the goal line, adopting hash marks, and legalizing forward passes from anywhere behind the line of scrimmage rather than five yards back.

First NFL Draft in 1936

Organized by Philadelphia Eagles owner Bert Bell to promote competitive balance among franchises, the first NFL Draft of collegiate players took place on February 8, 1936, at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Philadelphia.

Jay Berwanger First Draft Pick

University of Chicago halfback Jay Berwanger, winner of the first Heisman Trophy in 1935, was selected first overall by the Philadelphia Eagles in the inaugural 1936 NFL Draft, though he chose not to play professional football.

1940 Bears 73-0 Championship Rout

On December 8, 1940, George Halas's Chicago Bears unleashed the modernized T-formation to demolish the Washington Redskins 73-0 in the 1940 NFL Championship Game, the most lopsided victory in league history.

1943 Steagles Merger

Severe military enlistments during World War II forced the Pittsburgh Steelers and Philadelphia Eagles to temporarily merge their rosters for the 1943 season, competing as the combined 'Phil-Pitt Steagles.'

First Helmet Horns Logo

In 1948, Los Angeles Rams halfback and commercial artist Fred Gehrke hand-painted yellow ram horns onto the team's leather helmets, introducing the first decorative logo on football headgear.

Mandatory Helmets in 1943

Beginning with the 1943 season, the NFL officially mandated that all players on the field must wear protective leather helmets during regulation play.

Paul Brown Coaching Innovations

Legendary head coach Paul Brown revolutionized football operations in the 1940s and 1950s by pioneering systematic film study, classroom playbooks and player intelligence tests, adopting the 40-yard dash as a speed measure, and in 1956 trying a helmet radio built by two Ohio inventors (which the league promptly banned).

Browns AAFC Integration

Fullback Marion Motley and middle guard Bill Willis broke pro football's racial barrier in 1946 with Paul Brown's Cleveland Browns in the AAFC, both earning Hall of Fame induction for their dominant physical play.

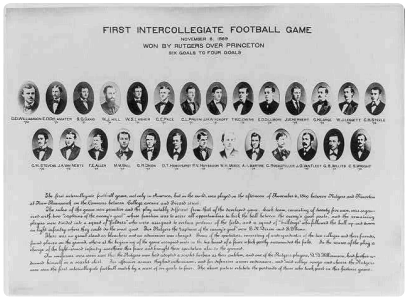
1958 Sudden Death Championship

Played on December 28, 1958, at Yankee Stadium, the NFL Championship Game between the Baltimore Colts and New York Giants became known as 'The Greatest Game Ever Played,' the first NFL championship game (and first playoff game) decided in sudden-death overtime.

Unitas Overtime Drive & Ameche Score

Colts quarterback Johnny Unitas engineered a flawless 80-yard drive in sudden-death overtime, culminating in fullback Alan Ameche's 1-yard touchdown plunge to seal a 23-17 Baltimore victory over the Giants.

Key facts



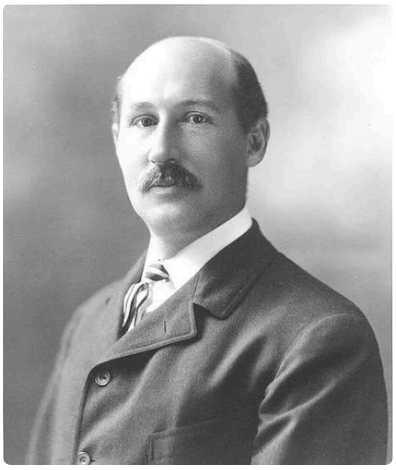
Library of Congress · First intercollegiate football game, November 6, 1869, won b · No known restrictions (verify at source)

The First College Football Game in 1869

On November 6, 1869, Rutgers defeated Princeton 6-4 in New Brunswick, New Jersey, in the first intercollegiate football game in American history.

The 1920 Formation of the APFA in Canton

The National Football League originated on September 17, 1920, as the American Professional Football Association during a meeting at Ralph Hay's Canton auto dealership.



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Walter Camp, the Father of American Football

Yale's Walter Camp authored the rules that separated American football from rugby, introducing the line of scrimmage, the center snap, and the system of downs. His innovations in the 1880s gave the sport its own identity and earned him lasting recognition as the 'Father of American Football.'

Two $500 Payments That Shaped Football

In 1892, former Yale guard William 'Pudge' Heffelfinger accepted 500 from the Allegheny Athletic Association, becoming the first known professional football player. Nearly three decades later, in 1919, Curly Lambeau reportedly got about 500 from his employer, the Indian Packing Company, to buy uniforms for his new hometown team, the Green Bay Packers.



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The Forward Pass Is Legalized in 1906

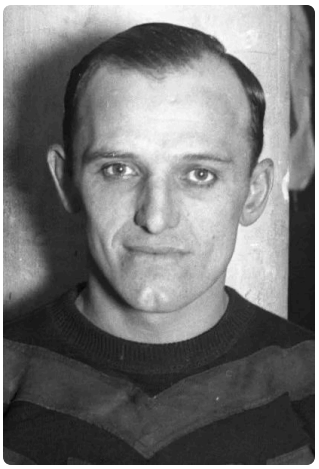
After the deadly 1905 season (about 19 player deaths by one count) and a White House summit, rules committees legalized the forward pass in 1906 to spread out offensive formations and reduce dangerous mass collisions. Saint Louis University's Bradbury Robinson is long credited with throwing the first legal forward pass in American football history that September; his first attempt fell incomplete, and a later throw to Jack Schneider went for a touchdown.



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The APFA's First Two Seasons

Olympic legend Jim Thorpe was elected the American Professional Football Association's first president in 1920. The Akron Pros went undefeated at 8-0-3 to win that inaugural season's title, and on October 3, 1920, the Dayton Triangles beat the Columbus Panhandles 14-0 in the league's first official game, with Lou Partlow scoring its first touchdown. In 1922, the league reorganized and adopted a new name: the National Football League.



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The Chicago Bears Begin as the Decatur Staleys

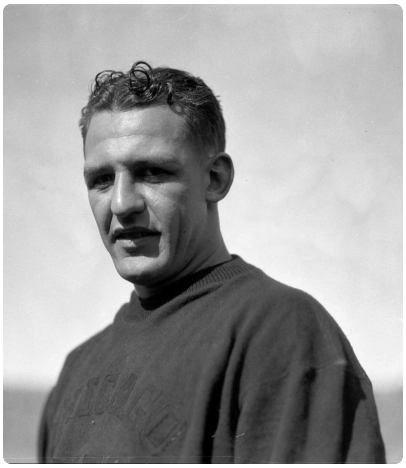
Before relocating to Chicago in 1921, the franchise now known as the Bears was founded in Decatur, Illinois, in 1920 as the Decatur Staleys, sponsored by starch manufacturer A.E. Staley. Staley hired player-coach George Halas to run the team.

Early Rules Reforms Made the Game Safer and Faster

Harvard's momentum-driven 'Flying Wedge' formation, devised in 1892, caused such severe injuries that rules-makers banned it just two years later, in 1894. In 1912, the rules committee shortened the field from 110 to 100 yards, added 10-yard end zones for forward passing, and raised the value of a touchdown to six points.

The 1958 'Greatest Game Ever Played'

The 1958 NFL Championship Game between Baltimore and the New York Giants was the first NFL championship game (and first playoff game) decided in sudden-death overtime, and its national television audience helped boost football's popularity.



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1920s Trailblazers: Grange and Pollard

Harold 'Red' Grange, the college and Chicago Bears halfback, earned the nickname 'The Galloping Ghost' after a four-touchdown outburst against Michigan in 1924, and his star power helped legitimize pro football when he joined the Bears in 1925. A few years earlier, in 1921, Fritz Pollard had become the NFL's first African-American head coach with the Akron Pros.

Pro Football Reintegrates in 1946

In 1946, the Los Angeles Rams signed former UCLA stars Kenny Washington and Woody Strode, breaking the NFL's 13-year unwritten color barrier. That same year, fullback Marion Motley and lineman Bill Willis integrated the rival All-America Football Conference with Paul Brown's Cleveland Browns.



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Breakthrough NFL Games of the 1930s and 1940s

A 1932 blizzard forced the Bears and Portsmouth Spartans to play the NFL's first tiebreaker playoff game indoors, on a dirt surface inside Chicago Stadium, a success that led the league to formalize an annual championship game. In 1940, George Halas's Bears routed the Washington Redskins 73-0 in the NFL Championship, still the most lopsided title-game result in league history.

The First NFL Draft (1936)

Eagles co-owner Bert Bell organized the NFL's inaugural collegiate player draft at Philadelphia's Ritz-Carlton Hotel on February 8, 1936. University of Chicago halfback Jay Berwanger, winner of the first Heisman Trophy, was selected first overall, though he ultimately chose a manufacturing career over pro football.

Milestones of the Wartime and Postwar NFL

Wartime enlistments left the Pittsburgh Steelers and Philadelphia Eagles short of players, so the two Pennsylvania franchises temporarily merged for the 1943 season as the 'Steagles.' Cleveland coach Paul Brown pioneered systematic game film study and printed playbooks that reshaped how teams prepared, and in 1958, Colts fullback Alan Ameche capped 'The Greatest Game Ever Played' with a one-yard overtime touchdown plunge to beat the Giants 23-17.



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NFL Helmets: Mandatory in 1943, First Logo in 1948

The NFL required all active players to wear protective helmets starting in the 1943 season. Five years later, Los Angeles Rams halfback and commercial artist Fred Gehrke painted yellow ram horns onto the team's blue leather helmets, creating the first decorative helmet logo in league history.

By the numbers

How many dollars was Pudge Heffelfinger paid in 1892 to become the first professional football player?

500 dollars

How many points did the Chicago Bears score in their historic 73-0 NFL Championship blowout in 1940?

73 points

Matched pairs

Each item on the left goes with the one on the right.

Bradbury Robinson → Threw the first legal forward pass in American football history in September 1906

Fritz Pollard → First African-American head coach in NFL history with the Akron Pros in 1921

Paul Brown → Pioneered systematic game film study, playbooks, and intelligence tests for players

Self-test

Answer each question from memory, then check your work against the answer key.

1. Which two colleges played in the first intercollegiate football game in 1869?

A Harvard and Yale
B Army and Navy
C Rutgers and Princeton
D Penn and Cornell

2. Who is known as the 'Father of American Football' for introducing the line of scrimmage and system of downs?

A Pop Warner
B Amos Alonzo Stagg
C Fielding Yost
D Walter Camp

3. How much was William 'Pudge' Heffelfinger paid in 1892 to become football's first professional player?

A $500
B $750
C $250
D $1,000

4. What was the main reason rules committees legalized the forward pass in 1906?

A Standardize the size of the field
B Reduce fatal mass-momentum collisions
C Shorten the length of games
D Increase overall scoring

5. Who was elected the first president of the American Professional Football Association in 1920?

A Walter Camp
B Curly Lambeau
C George Halas
D Jim Thorpe

6. What historic first did Fritz Pollard achieve with the Akron Pros in 1921?

A First African-American team owner in NFL history
B First African-American head coach in NFL history
C First African-American NFL commissioner
D First African-American quarterback in NFL history

7. Which nickname did Red Grange earn after his four-touchdown game against Michigan in 1924?

A The Golden Boy
B The Iron Horse
C The Galloping Ghost
D The Four Horsemen

8. Which two players signed by the Los Angeles Rams in 1946 broke the NFL's unwritten color barrier?

A Kenny Washington and Woody Strode
B Jim Brown and Bobby Mitchell
C Fritz Pollard and Paul Robeson
D Marion Motley and Bill Willis

9. By what score did the Chicago Bears rout the Washington Redskins in the 1940 NFL Championship?

A 59-0
B 45-0
C 28-7
D 73-0

10. What strategic and preparation innovations is Cleveland coach Paul Brown credited with pioneering?

A The Flying Wedge mass-momentum play
B The single-wing formation and drop-kick
C Game film study and printed playbooks
D The Power Sweep and pulling guards

Go deeper

WATCH The First Football Game 0:31 · YouTube
The first college football game was played on November 6, 1869.

WATCH The Circus Floor Playoff 0:30 · YouTube
In December 1932, two NFL teams finished tied at the top: the Chicago Bears and the Portsmouth Spartans.

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LESSON 2 OF 6

The Super Bowl Era and Iconic Championship Clashes

The AFL-NFL Merger and the Super Bowl Revolution · Dynasties, Immortals, and Historic Showdowns

WHAT YOU'LL BE ABLE TO DO

- Recall the AFL's "Foolish Club" founding, how a Wham-O Super Ball inspired "Super Bowl", Super Bowl I's 35-10 score, and Max McGee's game.
- Recall the 1972 Dolphins' 17-0, Chuck Noll's four titles in six years, the 1985 Bears' Shuffle and Refrigerator Perry, and Bill Walsh's West Coast Offense.

Lesson 2: The Super Bowl Era and Iconic Championship Clashes

The AFL-NFL Merger and the Super Bowl Revolution

The modern landscape of professional football was forged during the turbulent 1960s war between the established National Football League and the upstart American Football League (AFL). In 1959, Texas oil heir Lamar Hunt formed the AFL with seven fellow prospective owners, affectionately dubbed 'The Foolish Club.' The new league pioneered high-scoring offenses, official game clocks on stadium scoreboards, two-point conversions, and names on player jersey backs.

In 1966, Secret merger negotiations culminated in an agreement to hold an annual AFL-NFL World Championship Game. Lamar Hunt coined the moniker 'Super Bowl' after watching his children play with a high-bouncing Wham-O bouncy toy named the 'Super Ball.' On January 15, 1967, Vince Lombardi's Green Bay Packers defeated Hank Stram's Kansas City Chiefs 35-10 at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum in Super Bowl I, highlighted by backup wide receiver Max McGee catching seven passes for 138 yards and two touchdowns after being out late the previous evening.

The competitive credibility of the AFL was cemented on January 12, 1969, in Super Bowl III at the Miami Orange Bowl. New York Jets quarterback Joe Namath boldly guaranteed victory against Don Shula's heavily favored Baltimore Colts (roughly 18-point favorites), backing up his boast with a surgical 16-7 upset.

The complete AFL-NFL merger took effect in 1970 under Commissioner Pete Rozelle. To establish two balanced 13-team conferences, the Cleveland Browns, Pittsburgh Steelers, and Baltimore Colts agreed to transfer to the American Football Conference (AFC) in exchange for $3 million each. Rozelle transformed the NFL into America's most lucrative entertainment empire through equal television revenue sharing, the Sports Broadcasting Act of 1961, and the launch of ABC's Monday Night Football in September 1970.

The era also birthed the Vince Lombardi Trophy, designed on a cocktail napkin by Tiffany & Co. vice president Oscar Riedener in 1966 and officially renamed after Lombardi's passing in 1970. The 1972 Miami Dolphins made immortal history by defeating Washington 14-7 in Super Bowl VII to finish 17-0, the only NFL team to complete a season, playoffs included, undefeated and untied, despite the famous 'Garo's Gaffe' blocked field goal throw.

Key Historical Concepts and Trivia Milestones

Lamar Hunt and Foolish Club

After being repeatedly denied an NFL expansion team, Dallas businessman Lamar Hunt organized the American Football League in 1959 with eight original franchises whose owners called themselves 'The Foolish Club.'

Naming of the Super Bowl

AFL founder Lamar Hunt coined the term 'Super Bowl' in 1966 after observing his children playing with a high-bouncing Wham-O toy called the 'Super Ball,' which replaced the clunky title AFL-NFL World Championship Game.

Super Bowl I Outcome

On January 15, 1967, head coach Vince Lombardi led the NFL champion Green Bay Packers to a 35-10 victory over the AFL champion Kansas City Chiefs in Super Bowl I at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

Max McGee Unlikely Heroics

Packers reserve wide receiver Max McGee came off the bench after starting receiver Boyd Dowler was injured in Super Bowl I to catch seven passes for 138 yards and two touchdowns following a late night out before the game.

Joe Namath Super Bowl III Guarantee

Jets quarterback Joe Namath famously guaranteed victory three days before Super Bowl III and delivered a 16-7 upset over Don Shula's Baltimore Colts, roughly 18-point favorites, on January 12, 1969, at the Miami Orange Bowl.

1970 AFL-NFL Merger Completion

In 1970, the AFL and NFL completed their full merger, combining 26 teams into a single league organized into the American Football Conference (AFC) and National Football Conference (NFC).

Three NFL Teams Moving to AFC

To create two equal 13-team conferences upon the 1970 merger, original NFL franchises the Cleveland Browns, Pittsburgh Steelers, and Baltimore Colts agreed to move to the AFC in exchange for a $3 million settlement each.

Pete Rozelle Leadership

During his tenure from 1960 to 1989, NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle transformed professional football into America's most popular sport by introducing equal television revenue sharing and securing the Sports Broadcasting Act of 1961.

Monday Night Football Debut

ABC's Monday Night Football premiered on September 21, 1970, with the Cleveland Browns defeating Joe Namath's New York Jets 31-21, featuring the iconic broadcast booth of Howard Cosell, Don Meredith, and Keith Jackson.

Vince Lombardi Trophy Renaming

Following the legendary Packers coach's death from cancer, the NFL officially renamed the championship trophy the Vince Lombardi Trophy in September 1970.

Tiffany & Co. Trophy Napkin Sketch

In 1966, Tiffany & Co. vice president Oscar Riedener sketched the initial design of the sterling silver championship trophy featuring a regulation-size football in kicking position on a cocktail napkin during a lunch with Pete Rozelle.

Chuck Noll Steelers Dynasty

Pittsburgh Steelers head coach Chuck Noll led the franchise to four Super Bowl titles in six seasons between 1974 and 1979, becoming the first head coach in NFL history to win four Super Bowls. His Steelers were built around the 'Steel Curtain' defense, anchored by Joe Greene, Jack Lambert and Mel Blount.

1972 Miami Dolphins 17-0 Perfect Season

Head coach Don Shula guided the 1972 Miami Dolphins to a perfect 17-0 record, culminating in a 14-7 victory over the Washington Redskins in Super Bowl VII to become the only NFL team to finish a season, playoffs included, undefeated and untied.

Garo's Gaffe in Super Bowl VII

With Miami leading 14-0 in Super Bowl VII, Dolphins kicker Garo Yepremian attempted an awkward pass following a blocked field goal, fumbling the ball into the hands of Washington cornerback Mike Bass for a 49-yard touchdown.

Jackie Smith Drop in Super Bowl XIII

In Super Bowl XIII, Dallas Cowboys veteran tight end Jackie Smith dropped an uncontested touchdown pass in the end zone, prompting announcer Curt Gowdy to exclaim 'Bless his heart, he's got to be the sickest man in America.'

Dynasties, Immortals, and Historic Showdowns

The post-merger era of professional football is defined by legendary team dynasties, revolutionary defensive architectures, offensive masterminds, and historic Super Bowl drama. In 1985, Mike Ditka's Chicago Bears stormed through the NFL with a 15-1 regular season, releasing their Grammy-nominated 'Super Bowl Shuffle' music video before overwhelming the New England Patriots 46-10 in Super Bowl XX. Defensive coordinator Buddy Ryan's aggressive '46 Defense'—named after starting safety Doug Plank's jersey number—overwhelmed opposing offensive lines with eight-man fronts, while rookie 335-pound defensive tackle William 'The Refrigerator' Perry scored a rushing touchdown.

The 1980s belonged to Bill Walsh and the San Francisco 49ers. Walsh revolutionized modern gridiron tactics with the West Coast Offense, emphasizing short, rhythmic, horizontal passes to spread the defense and control time of possession. Guided by quarterback Joe Montana, who went 4-0 in Super Bowls with eleven touchdown passes and zero interceptions, San Francisco captured four titles (1981, 1984, 1988, 1989). In Super Bowl XXIII, Montana calmly pointed out comedian John Candy in the stands before driving the 49ers 92 yards to defeat the Bengals on a ten-yard touchdown strike to John Taylor with 34 seconds remaining.

In the 1990s, Jimmy Johnson built the Dallas Cowboys dynasty after executing the 1989 blockbuster trade of running back Herschel Walker to the Minnesota Vikings for several players and a haul of conditional draft picks. The resulting draft capital landed Emmitt Smith, who joined quarterback Troy Aikman (the 1989 first overall pick) and wide receiver Michael Irvin (a 1988 first-round pick) as 'The Triplets,' the trio who powered Dallas to three Super Bowl titles in four seasons (XXVII, XXVIII, XXX). Conversely, Marv Levy's Buffalo Bills achieved the remarkable feat of reaching four consecutive Super Bowls from 1990 to 1993, but lost all four, beginning with Scott Norwood's heartbreaking 47-yard 'Wide Right' field goal miss with eight seconds left in Super Bowl XXV.

The twenty-first century was headlined by the New England Patriots dynasty under head coach Bill Belichick and quarterback Tom Brady, who won six Super Bowls across nine appearances between 2001 and 2018. In Super Bowl LI, New England mounted the greatest comeback in Super Bowl history, overcoming a 28-3 deficit against Atlanta to win 34-28 in overtime. Their run also featured two of the sport's most famous late-game plays, David Tyree's miraculous helmet catch in Super Bowl XLII that cost New England a perfect season and Malcolm Butler's goal-line interception that clinched Super Bowl XLIX, and the modern emergence of Patrick Mahomes and Andy Reid's Kansas City Chiefs.

Key Historical Concepts and Trivia Milestones

1985 Bears Super Bowl Shuffle

The dominant 1985 Chicago Bears finished 15-1 and recorded their famous 'Super Bowl Shuffle' charity music video two months before dismantling the New England Patriots 46-10 in Super Bowl XX.

Buddy Ryan's 46 Defense

Chicago Bears defensive coordinator Buddy Ryan developed the hyper-aggressive '46 Defense,' naming the revolutionary eight-men-in-the-box blitz package after starting strong safety Doug Plank's jersey number 46.

The Refrigerator Perry Super Bowl Touchdown

Bears rookie defensive tackle William 'The Refrigerator' Perry, weighing 335 pounds, became a cultural sensation by plunging into the end zone for a 1-yard rushing touchdown in Super Bowl XX.

Bill Walsh West Coast Offense

San Francisco 49ers head coach Bill Walsh transformed football strategy by developing the West Coast Offense, utilizing precise short-range horizontal passes as an extension of the running game to control tempo and field space.

Joe Montana Perfect Super Bowl Record

San Francisco 49ers quarterback Joe Montana compiled a perfect 4-0 Super Bowl record (XVI, XIX, XXIII, XXIV), completing 83 of 122 passes for 1,142 yards, 11 touchdowns, and zero interceptions while winning three Super Bowl MVP trophies.

Montana John Candy Drive in Super Bowl XXIII

Trailing 16-13 with 3:10 remaining in Super Bowl XXIII, Joe Montana famously relaxed his teammates by pointing to the stands and asking 'Isn't that John Candy?' before leading a 92-yard drive capped by John Taylor's game-winning touchdown catch.

1990s Dallas Cowboys Dynasty

Coached by Jimmy Johnson and Barry Switzer, the 1990s Dallas Cowboys captured three Super Bowl championships in four years powered by 'The Triplets': quarterback Troy Aikman, running back Emmitt Smith, and receiver Michael Irvin.

Herschel Walker Blockbuster Trade

On October 12, 1989, the Dallas Cowboys traded running back Herschel Walker to the Minnesota Vikings in exchange for several players and a haul of conditional draft choices, which Jimmy Johnson leveraged to draft Emmitt Smith, Russell Maryland, and Darren Woodson.

Buffalo Bills Four Straight Super Bowls

Head coach Marv Levy led the Buffalo Bills to four consecutive AFC titles and Super Bowl appearances from 1990 through 1993, the only team in NFL history to play in four straight Super Bowls.

Scott Norwood Wide Right

In Super Bowl XXV, Buffalo Bills kicker Scott Norwood pushed a potential game-winning 47-yard field goal wide right with eight seconds remaining, preserving a 20-19 victory for the New York Giants in the closest Super Bowl in history.

Patriots Belichick-Brady Dynasty

Between the 2001 and 2018 seasons, head coach Bill Belichick and quarterback Tom Brady led the New England Patriots to six Super Bowl championships (XXXVI, XXXVIII, XXXIX, XLIX, LI, LIII) and nine conference titles.

Super Bowl LI 28-3 Comeback

In Super Bowl LI on February 5, 2017, the New England Patriots staged the largest comeback in Super Bowl history, erasing a 28-3 deficit with 31 unanswered points to defeat the Atlanta Falcons 34-28 in the first Super Bowl overtime.

Super Bowl XLII David Tyree Helmet Catch

On third-and-5 in Super Bowl XLII, Giants receiver David Tyree pinned Eli Manning's pass against his helmet while falling backward with Rodney Harrison defending, paving the way for a 17-14 upset that shattered New England's 18-0 pursuit.

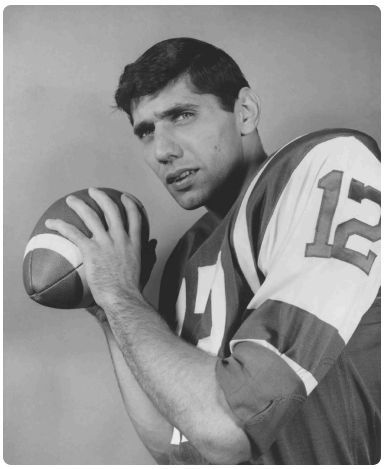
Malcolm Butler Super Bowl XLIX Interception

With New England leading 28-24 and 20 seconds remaining in Super Bowl XLIX, undrafted rookie cornerback Malcolm Butler stepped in front of Ricardo Lockette at the goal line to intercept Russell Wilson and secure the Patriots championship.

Patrick Mahomes Chiefs Back-to-Back Titles

Quarterback Patrick Mahomes and head coach Andy Reid led the Kansas City Chiefs to back-to-back Super Bowl championships in Super Bowls LVII and LVIII, defeating the Eagles and 49ers to solidify modern dynasty status.

Key facts



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Joe Namath's Super Bowl III Guarantee

Before Super Bowl III in 1969, AFL champion New York Jets quarterback Joe Namath boldly guaranteed victory as 18-point underdogs, shocking the Baltimore Colts 16-7.

The 1970 AFL-NFL Merger and Monday Night Football

The 1970 AFL-NFL merger unified 26 franchises into AFC and NFC conferences and launched ABC's prime-time cultural phenomenon, Monday Night Football.



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Lamar Hunt: The Foolish Club and the Super Bowl Name

In 1959, Lamar Hunt and seven other owners rejected by the NFL founded the rival American Football League, jokingly calling themselves 'The Foolish Club.' In 1966, Hunt coined the term 'Super Bowl' after watching his children play with a high-bouncing Wham-O toy called the Super Ball.

Super Bowl I: Packers 35, Chiefs 10

On January 15, 1967, Vince Lombardi's Green Bay Packers defeated Hank Stram's Kansas City Chiefs 35-10 in the first Super Bowl at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. Packers receiver Max McGee, who had been out late the night before, caught 7 passes for 138 yards and 2 touchdowns in the win.



AI-generated (gpt-image-1.5)

1970: Conference Realignment and Monday Night Football's Debut

To balance the newly merged league into two 13-team conferences, the Cleveland Browns, Pittsburgh Steelers, and Baltimore Colts agreed to switch from the NFL to the AFC in exchange for $3 million apiece. That same year, on September 21, 1970, the Cleveland Browns beat Joe Namath's New York Jets 31-21 in the first Monday Night Football broadcast on ABC.



Jim Summaria · CC BY-SA 3.0

Building the Modern Super Bowl's Business and Trophy

Pete Rozelle served as NFL Commissioner from 1960 to 1989, pioneering league-wide revenue sharing and national television contracts that turned the NFL into a coast-to-coast broadcasting powerhouse. Following Vince Lombardi's death, the league renamed its championship trophy in his honor in September 1970, and Tiffany & Co. has handcrafted every sterling silver Lombardi Trophy since its original 1966 design.

> **Iconic Super Bowl Blunders**
>
> Miami kicker Garo Yepremian tried to pass a blocked kick in Super Bowl VII, but the ball slipped from his hands and was returned for Washington's only touchdown. Six years later, veteran Cowboys tight end Jackie Smith slipped and dropped an uncontested third-quarter touchdown pass in Dallas's 35-31 loss to Pittsburgh in Super Bowl XIII.



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The 1972 Miami Dolphins Undefeated 17-0 Season

Under Hall of Fame coach Don Shula, the 1972 Miami Dolphins finished 17-0, remaining the only team in NFL history to complete a perfect undefeated season capped by a Super Bowl win.



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The Pittsburgh Steelers' Steel Curtain Dynasty

The 1970s Pittsburgh Steelers won four Super Bowls in six years behind Chuck Noll's 'Steel Curtain' defense featuring Joe Greene, Jack Lambert, and Mel Blount.

The 1985 Bears' Swagger and Star Power

The 15-1 Chicago Bears recorded the charity music video 'The Super Bowl Shuffle' in December 1985, which earned a Grammy nomination and sold over 500,000 copies. Defensive coordinator Buddy Ryan named the team's smothering '46 Defense' after hard-hitting safety Doug Plank's jersey number, and 335-pound rookie defensive tackle William 'The Refrigerator' Perry scored a rushing touchdown as Chicago routed New England 46-10 in Super Bowl XX.

Dynasty-Era Moments: The Trade and the Cameo

Before leading a 92-yard game-winning drive in Super Bowl XXIII, 49ers quarterback Joe Montana pointed to the stands and asked a teammate, 'Isn't that John Candy?' to calm his teammates. That same year, in 1989, Dallas coach Jimmy Johnson traded running back Herschel Walker to Minnesota for several players and a haul of conditional draft picks, draft capital he used to select Emmitt Smith and build the Cowboys' 1990s dynasty.



AI-generated (gpt-image-1.5)

The Buffalo Bills' Four Straight Super Bowl Losses

The Buffalo Bills are the only franchise in NFL history (through the 2025 season) to play in four consecutive Super Bowls, appearing in Super Bowls XXV through XXVIII from 1990 to 1993 and losing all four. The first loss came when kicker Scott Norwood's 47-yard field-goal attempt sailed wide right with eight seconds left in Super Bowl XXV.

Patriots-Defining Super Bowl Plays

Giants receiver David Tyree pinned Eli Manning's pass against his own helmet while being dragged down by Rodney Harrison, setting up New York's game-winning drive that denied the previously unbeaten Patriots a perfect season in Super Bowl XLII. Seven years later, undrafted Patriots cornerback Malcolm Butler intercepted Russell Wilson at the 1-yard line with 20 seconds left to preserve New England's 28-24 win in Super Bowl XLIX.



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The Chiefs Repeat as Super Bowl Champions

Led by Patrick Mahomes and coach Andy Reid, the Kansas City Chiefs won consecutive Super Bowl titles in Super Bowl LVII and Super Bowl LVIII. They became the first team in 19 years to repeat as NFL champions.

By the numbers

By how many points was the Baltimore Colts favored over Joe Namath's Jets in Super Bowl III?

18 points

How many Super Bowl titles did head coach Chuck Noll win with the Pittsburgh Steelers in the 1970s?

4 titles

How many pounds did rookie defensive tackle William 'The Refrigerator' Perry weigh during Super Bowl XX?

335 pounds

How many interceptions did Joe Montana throw across his four career Super Bowl starts (XVI, XIX, XXIII, XXIV)?

0 interceptions

How many consecutive Super Bowls did the Buffalo Bills reach (and lose) from 1990 to 1993?

4 Super Bowls

How many Super Bowl titles did Bill Belichick and Tom Brady win together in New England?

6 titles

Matched pairs

Each item on the left goes with the one on the right.

Max McGee → Caught 7 passes for 138 yards and 2 touchdowns in Super Bowl I after a late night out

Pete Rozelle
→ NFL Commissioner (1960-1989) who created league-wide revenue sharing and national TV packages

Bill Walsh
→ Architect of the West Coast Offense based on short, rhythmic, timing-based horizontal passing

Self-test

Answer each question from memory, then check your work against the answer key.

1. How many original owners founded the American Football League in 1959, jokingly calling themselves 'The Foolish Club'?

A 10
B 12
C 8
D 6

2. What inspired AFL founder Lamar Hunt to coin the term 'Super Bowl' in 1966?

A A Wham-O Super Ball toy
B A Hula-Hoop toy
C A Slinky toy
D A Frisbee toy

3. What was the final score of Super Bowl I between the Green Bay Packers and Kansas City Chiefs?

A 24-3
B 35-10
C 31-13
D 27-14

4. Which Packers receiver caught 7 passes for 138 yards and 2 touchdowns in Super Bowl I after a late night out?

A Marv Fleming
B Boyd Dowler
C Carroll Dale
D Max McGee

5. Which of these was NOT one of the AFL's early innovations before the NFL merger?

A Sudden-death overtime
B Two-point conversions
C Names on jersey backs
D Official game clocks on scoreboards

6. What was the final record, playoffs included, of the 1972 Miami Dolphins, the only team to complete a perfect season capped by a Super Bowl win?

A 14-0
B 16-0
C 15-1
D 17-0

7. Which head coach led the Pittsburgh Steelers' 'Steel Curtain' defense to four Super Bowls in six years?

A Don Shula
B Tom Landry
C Chuck Noll
D Bud Grant

8. How many pounds did rookie defensive tackle William 'The Refrigerator' Perry weigh during Super Bowl XX?

A 275 lbs
B 335 lbs
C 300 lbs
D 350 lbs

9. Which coach is credited as the architect of the West Coast Offense, built on short, timing-based horizontal passing?

A Buddy Ryan
B Chuck Noll
C Don Shula
D Bill Walsh

10. Which player was NOT part of the Pittsburgh Steelers' 'Steel Curtain' defense of the 1970s?

A Doug Plank
B Joe Greene
C Mel Blount
D Jack Lambert

Go deeper

WATCH Named After a Toy 0:31 · YouTube
In 1966, the AFL and the NFL agreed to play a championship game. Its official name was the AFL-NFL World Championship Game.

WATCH Isn't That John Candy? 0:30 · YouTube
Joe Montana played in 4 Super Bowls and won all 4. He threw 11 touchdown passes and 0 interceptions.

ONLINE This lesson on the web flashfeedlearningapp.com/study-guides/american-football-trivia/the-super-bowl-era-and-iconic-championship-clashes

STUDY American Football Trivia & Gridiron Lore in the FlashFeed app
flashfeedlearningapp.com/packs/american-football-trivia

LESSON 3 OF 6

Legendary Quarterbacks, Gunslingers, and Field Generals

Classic Pocket Passing Titans and Record Setters · The Modern Masters and Dual-Threat Revolution

WHAT YOU'LL BE ABLE TO DO

- Recall Unitas's 47-game touchdown streak, Marino's 1984 season, Favre's 297 straight starts, Fouts's Air Coryell, Starr's five titles, and Manning's five MVPs.
- Recall Brady's 199th pick and 649 TD passes, Tarkenton's scrambling, Newton's 75 QB rushing TDs (passed by Allen in 2025) and Young's six in Super Bowl XXIX.

Lesson 3: Legendary Quarterbacks, Gunslingers, and Field Generals

Classic Pocket Passing Titans and Record Setters

The evolution of the quarterback position is the central narrative thread of professional football history, transitioning from 1950s field generals calling their own plays at the line of scrimmage to modern aerial statistical titans. Johnny Unitas of the Baltimore Colts defined the modern passing prototype, establishing an unbroken half-century benchmark by throwing a touchdown pass in 47 consecutive regular-season games between 1956 and 1960 (eventually surpassed 52 years later by Drew Brees at 54 games). Bart Starr personified championship poise for Vince Lombardi's Green Bay Packers, winning five NFL Championships in seven years, including the first two Super Bowls where he claimed MVP honors in both.

In 1984, second-year Miami Dolphins gunslinger Dan Marino shattered all existing conceptual limits on passing volume, compiling 5,084 passing yards and 48 touchdown passes in a single 16-game campaign. Marino's legendary quick-release mechanics and aerial dominance established statistical milestones that stood for decades (his 48-touchdown mark until 2004, his 5,084 yards until Drew Brees threw for 5,476 in 2011). Meanwhile, Brett Favre brought an irrepressible ironman toughness to the Green Bay Packers, starting 297 consecutive regular-season games (321 including playoffs) from 1992 through 2010. In a classic piece of gridiron trivia, Favre's very first completed NFL pass was thrown to himself in 1992 after being deflected back into his hands by Tampa Bay defensive lineman Ray Seals.

Peyton Manning elevated the position to an intellectual science with his maestro-like pre-snap orchestrations and 'Omaha' cadence. Manning captured a record five NFL Most Valuable Player awards (2003, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2013), setting the single-season all-time passing records in 2013 with 5,477 passing yards and 55 touchdown passes for the Denver Broncos. John Elway capped a storied career featuring five Super Bowl appearances by winning back-to-back titles in Super Bowls XXXII and XXXIII, immortalized by his airborne 'helicopter dive' on third-and-6 against the Packers.

Other pocket titans redefined aerial offense. Dan Fouts directed Don Coryell's explosive 'Air Coryell' scheme in San Diego, leading the NFL in passing yards for four consecutive seasons (1979-1982). Drew Brees recorded an NFL-record five 5,000-yard passing seasons, completing 74.4% of his passes in 2018. Aaron Rodgers has the highest career touchdown-to-interception ratio in NFL history (above 4 touchdowns per interception through the 2025 season), while Warren Moon amassed 49,325 NFL passing yards after dominating the Canadian Football League with five consecutive Grey Cup championships. Kurt Warner authored one of sports history's greatest fairy tales, moving from stocking grocery store shelves in Cedar Falls, Iowa, to leading the St. Louis Rams' 'Greatest Show on Turf' to a Super Bowl XXXIV title and NFL MVP honors in 1999.

Key Historical Concepts and Trivia Milestones

Johnny Unitas 47-Game Streak

Baltimore Colts hall of fame quarterback Johnny Unitas set an iconic record by throwing at least one touchdown pass in 47 consecutive regular-season games between 1956 and 1960, a mark that stood for over five decades.

Bart Starr Championship Record

Packers quarterback Bart Starr orchestrated five NFL championship titles (1961, 1962, 1965, 1966, 1967) and won MVP honors in both Super Bowl I and Super Bowl II under head coach Vince Lombardi.

Dan Marino 1984 Milestone Season

In his second NFL season in 1984, Miami Dolphins quarterback Dan Marino became the first player to pass for over 5,000 yards (5,084) and threw an unprecedented 48 touchdown passes to capture the NFL MVP award.

Brett Favre 297 Consecutive Starts

Green Bay Packers legend Brett Favre set the ultimate football endurance record by starting 297 consecutive regular-season games (321 including playoffs) at quarterback between September 1992 and December 2010.

Brett Favre First Pass to Himself

In his first appearance for the Green Bay Packers on September 13, 1992, Brett Favre's pass was batted back by Tampa Bay defensive lineman Ray Seals; Favre caught the rebound for a seven-yard loss.

Peyton Manning Record 5 MVP Awards

Quarterback Peyton Manning captured the Associated Press NFL Most Valuable Player award a record five times (2003, 2004, 2008, 2009 with Indianapolis, and 2013 with Denver), more than any player in league history.

Peyton Manning 55 Touchdown Record

During the 2013 season with the Denver Broncos, Peyton Manning established all-time single-season NFL records by passing for 5,477 yards and throwing 55 touchdown passes.

John Elway Five Super Bowl Starts

Denver Broncos hall of famer John Elway played in five Super Bowls (XXI, XXII, XXIV, XXXII, XXXIII), concluding his 16-year career with consecutive Super Bowl victories in 1998 and 1999.

John Elway Helicopter Dive

In Super Bowl XXXII against the Green Bay Packers, 37-year-old John Elway scrambled on third-and-6 and leaped into three colliding defenders, spinning like a helicopter to secure a vital first down in Denver's 31-24 victory.

Dan Fouts Air Coryell Passing Titles

San Diego Chargers quarterback Dan Fouts directed head coach Don Coryell's revolutionary 'Air Coryell' downfield vertical passing offense, leading the NFL in passing yards four straight years from 1979 through 1982.

Drew Brees Five 5,000-Yard Seasons

New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees became the only passer in NFL history to record five different 5,000-yard passing seasons (2008, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2016), leading the league in passing yards seven times.

Aaron Rodgers TD-to-Interception Ratio

Four-time NFL MVP Aaron Rodgers holds the best career touchdown-to-interception ratio in league history, above 4 touchdowns for every interception through the 2025 season.

Jim Kelly K-Gun No-Huddle Offense

Hall of Fame quarterback Jim Kelly called plays directly from the line of scrimmage in the Buffalo Bills' high-tempo 'K-Gun' no-huddle offense, preventing defensive substitutions and exhausting opponents.

Warren Moon CFL and NFL Stardom

After winning five consecutive Canadian Football League Grey Cup championships with the Edmonton Eskimos (1978-1982), Warren Moon entered the NFL at age 27, amassing 49,325 passing yards and nine Pro Bowl selections.

Kurt Warner Grocery Store to Super Bowl MVP

After stocking grocery shelves for $5.50 an hour at a Hy-Vee in Iowa and starring in Arena Football, Kurt Warner led the St. Louis Rams' 'Greatest Show on Turf' to victory in Super Bowl XXXIV, winning league and Super Bowl MVP honors in 1999.

The Modern Masters and Dual-Threat Revolution

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries transformed the quarterback from a static pocket passer into a multi-dimensional athletic weapon capable of destroying defenses with arm talent, pre-snap processing, and lethal open-field scrambling. At the pinnacle of the sport stands Tom Brady, selected 199th overall in the sixth round of the 2000 NFL Draft by the New England Patriots. Brady went on to author the greatest individual career in football history, capturing a record seven Super Bowl titles (six with New England, one with Tampa Bay) and retiring as the NFL's all-time leader in completions (7,753), passing yards (89,214), passing touchdowns (649), and quarterback wins (251).

Simultaneously, the dual-threat quarterback evolved from a rare curiosity into the dominant tactical paradigm. Fran Tarkenton pioneered the archetype with the Minnesota Vikings and New York Giants in the 1960s and 1970s, retiring as the NFL's all-time leader in passing yards and quarterback rushing yards (3,674). In the late 1980s, Philadelphia Eagles superstar Randall Cunningham was christened 'The Ultimate Weapon' on a 1989 Sports Illustrated cover for his jaw-dropping ability to evade pass rushers and uncork 60-yard bombs; that December he punted the football 91 yards against the Giants.

The revolution accelerated dramatically in the 1990s and 2000s. Steve Young captured two NFL MVP awards and threw a record six touchdown passes in Super Bowl XXIX for the 49ers while compiling 43 career rushing touchdowns. In 2006, Atlanta Falcons electrifying speedster Michael Vick became the first quarterback in NFL history to rush for 1,000 yards in a single season (1,039 yards on an astonishing 8.4 yards per carry). Cam Newton redefined the power-running quarterback for the Carolina Panthers, winning the 2015 NFL MVP and finishing with 75 career rushing touchdowns, the NFL quarterback record until Buffalo's Josh Allen passed him in 2025.

In 2019, Baltimore Ravens dynamic playmaker Lamar Jackson became the second unanimous NFL MVP in history after setting the single-season quarterback rushing record with 1,206 yards while leading the league with 36 touchdown passes. Kansas City Chiefs phenom Patrick Mahomes merged impossible arm angles, sidearm throws, and no-look wizardry with championship pedigree, winning two NFL MVPs and three Super Bowl MVPs before age 29. The era also celebrated historic milestones: Doug Williams becoming the first Black quarterback to start and win a Super Bowl in Super Bowl XXII (throwing four second-quarter touchdowns), and George Blanda playing 26 seasons to retire at age 48 in 1975.

Key Historical Concepts and Trivia Milestones

Tom Brady 199th Draft Pick to 7 Rings

Selected with the 199th overall pick in the sixth round of the 2000 NFL Draft, Tom Brady quarterbacked the New England Patriots and Tampa Bay Buccaneers to a record seven Super Bowl victories (XXXVI,

XXXVIII, XXXIX, XLIX, LI, LIII, LV).

Tom Brady All-Time Passing Records

Over 23 NFL seasons, Tom Brady accumulated all-time records for regular-season passing yards (89,214), touchdown passes (649), completions (7,753), and regular-season quarterback wins (251).

Fran Tarkenton Scrambling Pioneer

Minnesota Vikings hall of famer Fran Tarkenton revolutionized the quarterback position in the 1960s and 1970s with his elusive scrambles, retiring in 1978 as the NFL's all-time leader in passing yards (47,003), touchdown passes (342) and quarterback rushing yards (3,674).

Randall Cunningham Ultimate Weapon

Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Randall Cunningham was featured on the cover of Sports Illustrated in 1989 as 'The Ultimate Weapon'. That December he punted 91 yards against the Giants, and he finished his career with 4,928 rushing yards and 35 rushing TDs.

Steve Young Super Bowl XXIX Record

In Super Bowl XXIX on January 29, 1995, San Francisco 49ers quarterback Steve Young dismantled the San Diego Chargers 49-26, completing 24 of 36 passes for 325 yards and a Super Bowl-record six touchdown passes.

Michael Vick 1,000-Yard Rushing Season

Atlanta Falcons quarterback Michael Vick made history in 2006 by becoming the first NFL quarterback to surpass 1,000 rushing yards in a single season, totaling 1,039 yards while averaging 8.4 yards per carry.

Cam Newton Career QB Rushing TDs

Carolina Panthers star Cam Newton finished his career with 75 rushing touchdowns, the NFL record for a quarterback until Buffalo's Josh Allen passed him in Week 13 of the 2025 season, and won the 2015 MVP award.

Lamar Jackson 2019 Unanimous MVP

In 2019, Baltimore Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson broke Michael Vick's single-season rushing record with 1,206 yards and led the NFL with 36 touchdown passes, becoming the second unanimous MVP in league history.

Patrick Mahomes 50 TDs & 5,000 Yards

In his first full year as the Kansas City Chiefs starter in 2018, Patrick Mahomes joined Peyton Manning as the only quarterbacks in NFL history to throw 50 touchdown passes and over 5,000 passing yards in the same season.

Patrick Mahomes No-Look Pass

On December 9, 2018, Patrick Mahomes stunned national audiences by staring down the middle of the field while firing a pinpoint sidearm no-look pass to receiver Demarcus Robinson against the Baltimore Ravens.

Russell Wilson Rookie Record & SB Win

Seattle Seahawks third-round pick Russell Wilson tied the then-rookie record with 26 touchdown passes in 2012, followed by guiding Seattle's 'Legion of Boom' to a 43-8 blowout of Denver in Super Bowl XLVIII.

Josh Allen Multiple 40-TD Seasons

Buffalo Bills powerhouse quarterback Josh Allen established a new NFL standard by recording at least 40 combined passing and rushing touchdowns in five consecutive seasons (2020-2024), becoming the first player with four in a row in 2023.

Jalen Hurts Super Bowl LVII Scoring Record

Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts set a Super Bowl record for the most points scored by a quarterback in a single game, scoring three rushing touchdowns and a two-point conversion (20 points) in Super Bowl LVII.

Doug Williams Historic Super Bowl XXII

Washington quarterback Doug Williams made history on January 31, 1988, becoming the first Black quarterback to start and win a Super Bowl, throwing four touchdown passes in a record 35-point second quarter in Super Bowl XXII.

George Blanda 26-Season Longevity

Hall of Famer George Blanda set the ultimate NFL longevity record by playing 26 seasons from 1949 through 1975 for the Bears, Oilers, and Raiders, retiring at age 48 as the oldest active player in league history.

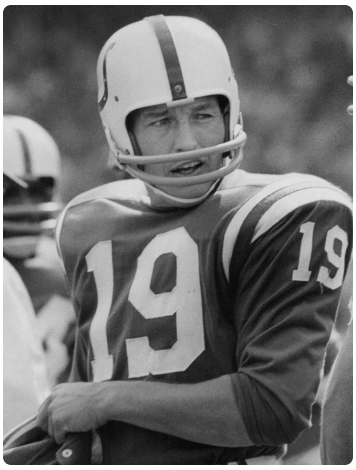
Key facts

Bill Walsh and the West Coast Offense

San Francisco 49ers coach Bill Walsh revolutionized pro football in the 1980s with the West Coast Offense, emphasizing high-percentage short horizontal passes as an extension of the run game.

Joe Montana's Super Bowl Perfection

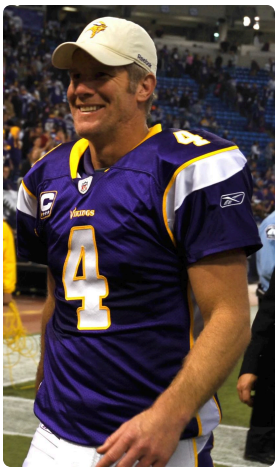
Hall of Fame quarterback Joe Montana led the 49ers to four Super Bowl titles without throwing a single interception in 122 championship pass attempts.



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Legendary Passing Streaks and Seasons

Johnny Unitas threw a touchdown pass in 47 consecutive games for the Colts from 1956 to 1960, a record that stood for 52 years until Drew Brees broke it in 2012. Brees went on to throw for more than 5,000 yards in five separate seasons, more than any other player in NFL history, while Dan Marino became the first quarterback to top 5,000 passing yards in a season, finishing 1984 with 5,084 yards and 48 touchdowns.



MN National Guard · CC BY 3.0

Brett Favre's Ironman Streak and Quirky NFL Debut

Brett Favre started 297 consecutive regular-season games from September 1992 to December 2010, an NFL ironman record for quarterbacks. His first NFL completion, in 1992 as a Packer, was a pass batted back by Buccaneers lineman Ray Seals that fell into his own hands for a seven-yard loss.



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John Elway's Five Super Bowl Starts

John Elway started at quarterback in five Super Bowls for the Denver Broncos (XXI, XXII, XXIV, XXXII, and XXXIII), retiring after winning back-to-back titles in his final two seasons. In Super Bowl XXXII, Elway's memorable 'helicopter dive' against the Green Bay Packers converted a crucial third-and-6.

Innovative Passing Offenses and Journeys

Chargers quarterback Dan Fouts led the NFL in passing yards for four consecutive seasons from 1979 to 1982 running Don Coryell's vertical 'Air Coryell' attack. Buffalo's Jim Kelly ran the up-tempo 'K-Gun' no-huddle offense, calling plays himself at the line of scrimmage, while Warren Moon won five straight Grey Cup championships with the Edmonton Eskimos from 1978 to 1982 before starting his Hall of Fame NFL career.



Sgt. Macario P. Mora Jr · Public domain

Kurt Warner: From Grocery Clerk to Super Bowl MVP

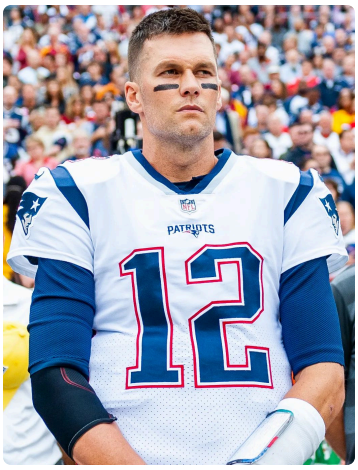
Before quarterbacking the St. Louis Rams to a title in Super Bowl XXXIV, Kurt Warner was stocking shelves at an Iowa Hy-Vee grocery store for $5.50 an hour. His rapid rise from grocery clerk to NFL MVP became one of football's signature underdog stories.

The 1985 Chicago Bears '46 Defense'

Buddy Ryan's suffocating '46 Defense', led by linebacker Mike Singletary, helped the 1985 Chicago Bears to a 15-1 regular season and a 46-10 Super Bowl XX win over New England.

The 1990s Dallas Cowboys 'Triplets' Dynasty

Troy Aikman, Emmitt Smith, and Michael Irvin powered the Dallas Cowboys to three Super Bowl titles in four seasons (1992, 1993, 1995).



Alexander Jonesi · CC BY-SA 2.0

Tom Brady: From 199th Pick to All-Time Passing Leader

The New England Patriots selected Tom Brady 199th overall in the sixth round of the 2000 NFL Draft. Brady went on to win seven Super Bowl titles and retired as the NFL's all-time leader with 649 regular-season touchdown passes.

Mobile Quarterback Pioneers

Minnesota's Fran Tarkenton popularized the scrambling quarterback style, retiring with 3,674 career rushing yards and 342 career touchdown passes. Philadelphia's Randall Cunningham followed as a similarly dynamic threat, called 'The Ultimate Weapon' on a 1989 Sports Illustrated cover for his scrambling and deep throws, and that December he punted 91 yards against the Giants.

Super Bowl Passing and Scoring Records

Steve Young threw six touchdown passes against San Diego in Super Bowl XXIX, breaking Joe Montana's previous single-game record of five. Doug Williams became the first African-American starting quarterback to win a Super Bowl, throwing four touchdowns in a record 35-point second quarter of Super Bowl XXII, and Jalen Hurts later set the Super Bowl quarterback scoring record with three rushing touchdowns and a two-point conversion, 20 points in all, in Super Bowl LVII.

Quarterbacks Who Redefined Rushing

In 2006, Atlanta's Michael Vick became the first quarterback in NFL history to rush for over 1,000 yards in a season, finishing with 1,039 yards. Carolina's Cam Newton finished his career with 75 rushing touchdowns, the NFL quarterback record until Buffalo's Josh Allen passed him in Week 13 of the 2025 season. In 2019 Baltimore's Lamar Jackson rushed for an NFL single-season quarterback record 1,206 yards on his way to a unanimous MVP award.



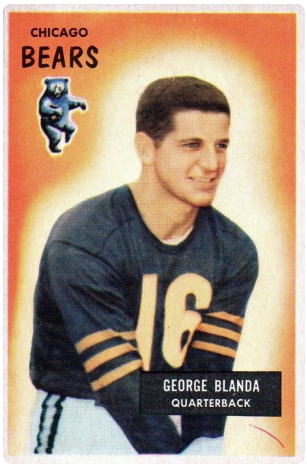
All-Pro Reels · CC BY-SA 2.0

Patrick Mahomes' Breakout 2018 Season

In his first year as a full-time starter in 2018, Patrick Mahomes threw 50 touchdown passes and 5,097 passing yards, joining Peyton Manning as the only players to reach both marks in a season. That December, Mahomes went viral against Baltimore for a sidearm 'no-look pass' thrown while looking toward the middle of the field.

Record Rookie and Breakout Seasons

As a third-round rookie in 2012, Russell Wilson threw 26 touchdown passes for Seattle, tying Peyton Manning's then-standing rookie record, and won Super Bowl XLVIII the following season. Buffalo's Josh Allen later became the first player in NFL history to record five consecutive seasons (2020 to 2024) with 40 or more combined passing and rushing touchdowns.



Bowman · Public domain

George Blanda's Record 26-Season Career

Quarterback and kicker George Blanda played 26 NFL seasons, from 1949 through 1975, retiring at age 48 as the oldest player in league history. He finished his career with 2,002 total points scored.

By the numbers

How many consecutive games did Johnny Unitas throw a touchdown pass from 1956 to 1960?

47 games

How many touchdown passes did Dan Marino throw during his record-shattering 1984 MVP campaign?

48 touchdowns

What is Brett Favre's all-time NFL ironman record for consecutive regular season quarterback starts?

297 starts

How many NFL Most Valuable Player (MVP) awards did Peyton Manning win during his career?

5 awards

Through the 2025 season, what is the all-time NFL single-season record for touchdown passes, set by Peyton Manning in 2013?

55 touchdowns

In how many Super Bowls did John Elway start as quarterback for the Denver Broncos?

5 Super Bowls

How many career 5,000-yard passing seasons did Drew Brees record in the NFL?

5 seasons

How many consecutive Grey Cup championships did Warren Moon win in the CFL before entering the NFL?

5 championships

What overall draft pick was Tom Brady selected with in the sixth round of the 2000 NFL Draft?

199 pick

What is Tom Brady's all-time NFL record for regular-season touchdown passes?

649 touchdowns

How many touchdown passes did Steve Young throw in Super Bowl XXIX to set the all-time single-game record?

6 touchdowns

How many career regular-season rushing touchdowns did Cam Newton score, a quarterback record until Josh Allen passed it in 2025?

75 touchdowns

How many rushing yards did Lamar Jackson total in his unanimous 2019 MVP season to set the single-season QB record?

1206 yards

How many touchdown passes did Russell Wilson throw as a third-round rookie in 2012 to tie Peyton Manning's rookie mark?

26 touchdowns

How many rushing touchdowns did Jalen Hurts score in Super Bowl LVII to set the Super Bowl quarterback scoring record?

3 touchdowns

At what age did quarterback and kicker George Blanda retire in 1975 as the oldest player in NFL history?

48 years old

Matched pairs

Each item on the left goes with the one on the right.

Dan Fouts → Led the NFL in passing yards for four consecutive seasons (1979-1982) in Air Coryell

Fran Tarkenton
→ Pioneered the scrambling quarterback archetype, retiring with 3,674 rushing yards and 342 touchdown passes

Josh Allen
→ First player in NFL history with five consecutive seasons (2020-2024) of 40+ combined passing and rushing touchdowns

Self-test

Answer each question from memory, then check your work against the answer key.

1. Johnny Unitas set an NFL record by throwing a touchdown pass in how many consecutive games (1956-1960)?

A) 297 games
B) 47 games
C) 54 games
D) 16 games

2. Which quarterback passed for 5,084 yards and 48 touchdowns in his 1984 MVP season?

A) John Elway
B) Dan Fouts
C) Dan Marino
D) Warren Moon

3. What is Brett Favre's NFL record for consecutive regular-season starts at quarterback?

A) 297
B) 270
C) 210
D) 321

4. Which quarterback led the NFL in passing yards for four straight seasons (1979-1982) running the 'Air Coryell' offense?

A) Dan Marino
B) John Elway
C) Drew Brees
D) Dan Fouts

5. Which year was NOT one of Peyton Manning's five NFL MVP seasons?

A) 2009
B) 2013
C) 2003
D) 2010

6. What overall pick was Tom Brady selected with in the 2000 NFL Draft?

A) 12
B) 75
C) 199
D) 32

7. Which quarterback popularized the scrambling style, retiring with 3,674 rushing yards and 342 touchdown passes?

A) Cam Newton
B) Fran Tarkenton
C) Randall Cunningham
D) Michael Vick

8. Which of these statements about George Blanda's career is NOT true?

A) Won Super Bowl MVP honors
B) Scored 2,002 career points
C) Retired at age 48
D) Played 26 NFL seasons

9. How many career rushing touchdowns did Cam Newton finish with, the NFL quarterback record until Josh Allen passed it in 2025?

A 26
B 55
C 75
D 48

10. Which quarterback threw a record six touchdown passes in Super Bowl XXIX?

A Jalen Hurts
B Joe Montana
C Doug Williams
D Steve Young

Go deeper

WATCH A Pass to Himself 0:30 · YouTube
Brett Favre started 297 straight regular-season games at quarterback, from 1992 to 2010. Counting playoffs, it was 321.

WATCH Pick 199 0:32 · YouTube
In the 2000 NFL Draft, 198 players were picked before Tom Brady.

ONLINE This lesson on the web flashfeedlearningapp.com/study-guides/american-football-trivia/legendary-quarterbacks-gunslingers-and-field-generals

STUDY American Football Trivia & Gridiron Lore in the FlashFeed app
flashfeedlearningapp.com/packs/american-football-trivia

LESSON 4 OF 6

Record Breakers, Skill Position Icons, and Defensive Juggernauts

Rushing Royalty and Receiving Marvels · Defensive Titans, Sacks, and The Enforcers

WHAT YOU'LL BE ABLE TO DO

- Identify the career rushing record of Emmitt Smith and the signature rushing marks of Walter Payton, Jim Brown and Barry Sanders.
- Recall Deacon Jones coining "sack", Bruce Smith's record 200 sacks, Lawrence Taylor's 1986 MVP, and Aaron Donald's three Defensive Player of the Year awards.

Lesson 4: Record Breakers, Skill Position Icons, and Defensive Juggernauts

Rushing Royalty and Receiving Marvels

The pantheon of NFL record-breakers features skill-position legends whose statistical dominance and physical artistry defined entire eras of professional football. At the summit of rushing royalty stands Emmitt Smith, the tireless workhorse of the 1990s Dallas Cowboys, who amassed an all-time record 18,355 rushing yards and 164 rushing touchdowns over fifteen seasons. Smith broke the previous standard held by Chicago Bears immortal Walter Payton ('Sweetness'), who retired with 16,726 yards, 110 rushing touchdowns, and a historic 275-yard single-game performance against the Vikings in 1977 while battling flu symptoms.

Cleveland Browns powerhouse Jim Brown remains football's most dominant force, averaging 5.2 yards per carry across nine seasons (1957-1965), winning eight rushing titles in nine years, and never missing a single game in his 118-game career. Detroit Lions magician Barry Sanders delivered the most elusive highlights in league history, gliding for 15,269 rushing yards in ten seasons, including a 2,053-yard campaign in 1997 (he shared the AP MVP with Brett Favre) with fourteen consecutive 100-yard games, before retiring in his prime. Eric Dickerson set the single-season rushing record in 1984 with 2,105 yards for the Rams, while Adrian Peterson broke the single-game rushing record with 296 yards against San Diego on November 4, 2007.

The receiving record books are dominated by one untouchable name: Jerry Rice. Over a 20-year career primarily with the San Francisco 49ers, Rice established unbreakable all-time standards with 1,549 receptions, 22,895 receiving yards, and 208 total touchdowns. Wide receiver icons also include Randy Moss, who set the rookie touchdown record with 17 in 1998 and the single-season touchdown catch record with 23 in 2007 with New England; Calvin Johnson ('Megatron'), who set the single-season receiving yardage record with 1,964 yards in 2012 for Detroit; and Don Hutson, who invented modern route running in the 1930s and 1940s with Green Bay.

The tight end position was completely redefined by Kansas City's Tony Gonzalez, who retired with 1,325 catches and 15,127 receiving yards; Rob Gronkowski, who caught an NFL tight end record 17 touchdowns in 2011; and Travis Kelce, who posted seven consecutive 1,000-yard seasons. In backfield versatility, Marshall Faulk became the second player (after Roger Craig in 1985) with 1,000 rushing and 1,000 receiving yards in a season (1999), gaining a then-record 2,429 scrimmage yards, while LaDainian Tomlinson scored an all-time single-season record 31 total touchdowns (28 rushing, 3 receiving) and 186 points in 2006 for San Diego.

Key Historical Concepts and Trivia Milestones

Emmitt Smith All-Time Rushing Leader

Dallas Cowboys hall of famer Emmitt Smith is the NFL's all-time leading rusher, compiling 18,355 rushing yards and 164 rushing touchdowns across 15 seasons from 1990 to 2004.

Walter Payton Career Records

Chicago Bears legend Walter 'Sweetness' Payton retired in 1987 as the NFL's career rushing leader with 16,726 yards, having held the single-game rushing record of 275 yards set against Minnesota on November 20, 1977.

Jim Brown Unprecedented Dominance

Cleveland Browns fullback Jim Brown led the NFL in rushing in eight of his nine seasons (1957-1965), averaging 5.2 yards per carry and 104.3 yards per game while never missing a contest in his 118-game career.

Barry Sanders 15,269 Yards in 10 Seasons

Detroit Lions icon Barry Sanders amassed 15,269 rushing yards in just 10 seasons, earning Pro Bowl honors every year and rushing for 2,053 yards with 14 consecutive 100-yard games during his 1997 co-MVP campaign (shared with Brett Favre).

Eric Dickerson Single-Season Rushing Record

In his second professional season in 1984, Los Angeles Rams running back Eric Dickerson rushed for an all-time NFL single-season record of 2,105 yards on 379 carries.

Adrian Peterson 296-Yard Single-Game Record

On November 4, 2007, Minnesota Vikings rookie running back Adrian Peterson rushed for an NFL single-game record 296 yards and three touchdowns on 30 carries against the San Diego Chargers.

Jerry Rice Unbroken Receiving Standards

San Francisco 49ers legend Jerry Rice established all-time NFL career records with 1,549 receptions, 22,895 receiving yards, and 208 total touchdowns (197 receiving, 10 rushing, 1 fumble recovery).

Randy Moss 23 Receiving Touchdowns Record

In 2007 with the New England Patriots, wide receiver Randy Moss caught an NFL single-season record 23 touchdown passes from Tom Brady, eclipsing Jerry Rice's previous mark of 22 set in 1987.

Calvin Johnson 1,964-Yard Receiving Record

Detroit Lions wide receiver Calvin 'Megatron' Johnson set the NFL single-season record with 1,964 receiving yards on 122 receptions in 2012, breaking Jerry Rice's 1995 record of 1,848 yards.

Don Hutson Wide Receiver Pioneer

Green Bay Packers end Don Hutson revolutionized pass catching from 1935 to 1945, leading the NFL in receptions eight times and receiving touchdowns nine times, retiring with 99 career touchdown receptions.

Tony Gonzalez Tight End Receptions Record

Kansas City Chiefs and Atlanta Falcons tight end Tony Gonzalez transformed the position with 1,325 career receptions, 15,127 receiving yards, and 111 touchdown catches over 17 seasons.

Rob Gronkowski 17 Tight End Touchdowns

In 2011, New England Patriots tight end Rob Gronkowski established the single-season tight end record by catching 17 touchdown passes (18 total touchdowns) with 1,327 receiving yards.

Travis Kelce Seven 1,000-Yard Seasons

Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce became the first tight end in NFL history to record seven consecutive 1,000-yard receiving seasons (2016-2022) and the all-time postseason receptions leader.

Marshall Faulk 1,000/1,000 Season

In 1999, St. Louis Rams running back Marshall Faulk became the second player in NFL history (joining Roger Craig) to surpass 1,000 rushing yards (1,381) and 1,000 receiving yards (1,048) in a single season, setting a then-record 2,429 scrimmage yards.

LaDainian Tomlinson 31 Touchdowns in 2006

San Diego Chargers running back LaDainian Tomlinson scored an all-time NFL single-season record 31 total touchdowns (28 rushing, 3 receiving) and 186 points during his 2006 MVP campaign.

Defensive Titans, Sacks, and The Enforcers

Defensive football has produced some of the most fearsome and game-wrecking athletes in sporting history, players who altered opposing offensive game plans through ferocious quarterback pressure, punishing tackling, and ball-hawking secondary dominance. Lawrence Taylor of the New York Giants fundamentally changed offensive line protection schemes. In 1986, Taylor won the NFL Most Valuable Player award—one of only two defensive players ever to win the honor, alongside Minnesota Vikings defensive tackle Alan Page in 1971—after racking up 20.5 sacks and prompting coaches like Joe Gibbs to develop the H-back and lean on two-tight-end blocking sets.

Los Angeles Rams defensive end David 'Deacon' Jones, the anchor of the fearsome 1960s 'Fearsome Foursome,' is credited with coining the term 'sack'; he explained it by comparing tackling the quarterback behind the line of scrimmage to sacking, or devastating, a city. The official career sack record belongs to Buffalo Bills defensive end Bruce Smith, who recorded 200.0 official sacks across nineteen seasons (1985-2003), edging Green Bay and Philadelphia legend Reggie White ('The Minister of Defense'), who tallied 198.0 career sacks. Cleveland's Myles Garrett set the single-season sack record with 23.0 in 2025, passing the 22.5 that Michael Strahan set in 2001 and T.J. Watt matched in 2021, while Kansas City's Derrick Thomas set the single-game record with 7.0 sacks against Seattle on Veterans Day 1990.

The defensive backfield featured electric playmakers. Deion Sanders ('Prime Time') remains the most electrifying cover cornerback in football lore, recording 19 defensive and return touchdowns and remaining the only athlete in history to play in both a Super Bowl and a Major League Baseball World Series. Rod Woodson holds the all-time NFL record with 12 interception return touchdowns among his 71 career picks, while Paul Krause holds the career interception standard with 81 picks. In 1952, Rams rookie Dick 'Night Train' Lane set the single-season interception record with 14 in a 12-game season.

In the modern era, Ed Reed terrorized quarterbacks for the Baltimore Ravens, holding the two longest interception returns in NFL history (106 yards against Cleveland in 2004 and 107 yards against Philadelphia in 2008). Middle linebacker Ray Lewis captained two Baltimore Super Bowl victories twelve years apart, while Ronnie Lott famously chose to amputate the tip of his left pinky finger after the 1985 season rather than miss the start of the next one. Defensive lineman Aaron Donald dominated the 2010s for the Rams, winning three Defensive Player of the Year awards.

Key Historical Concepts and Trivia Milestones

Lawrence Taylor 1986 MVP

New York Giants linebacker Lawrence Taylor captured the 1986 NFL MVP award after recording 20.5 sacks, becoming only the second defensive player in history (after Alan Page in 1971) to win the league's highest individual honor.

Deacon Jones Coining the Sack

Los Angeles Rams defensive end Deacon Jones, leader of the 'Fearsome Foursome,' is credited with coining the term 'sack' in the 1960s, comparing tackling an opposing passer behind the line to sacking and destroying an entire city.

Reggie White Minister of Defense

Known as 'The Minister of Defense,' ordained minister Reggie White recorded 198.0 career sacks across 15 NFL seasons, leading the league in sacks twice and winning Super Bowl XXXI with Green Bay.

Bruce Smith 200 Career Sacks Record

Buffalo Bills defensive end Bruce Smith is the NFL's all-time sack leader with 200.0 official career sacks from 1985 to 2003, recording 13 seasons with at least ten sacks.

Single-Season Sack Record: Garrett's 23.0

Cleveland Browns defensive end Myles Garrett set the NFL single-season sack record with 23.0 in 2025, passing the 22.5 sacks of New York Giants defensive end Michael Strahan (2001) and Pittsburgh Steelers outside linebacker T.J. Watt (2021).

Derrick Thomas 7.0 Single-Game Sacks

Kansas City Chiefs outside linebacker Derrick Thomas set an unbroken NFL single-game record by sacking Seattle Seahawks quarterback Dave Krieg 7.0 times on Veterans Day, November 11, 1990.

Deion Sanders Prime Time Multi-Sport

Pro Football Hall of Famer Deion 'Prime Time' Sanders scored 19 career defensive and return touchdowns, won two Super Bowls (XXIX with 49ers, XXX with Cowboys), and is the only athlete to play in both a Super Bowl and the MLB World Series.

Rod Woodson 12 Pick-Sixes Record

Hall of Fame defensive back Rod Woodson intercepted 71 career passes and holds the all-time NFL record with 12 interception returns for touchdowns across his 17 seasons with the Steelers, 49ers, Ravens, and Raiders.

Paul Krause 81 Interceptions Record

Safety Paul Krause holds the NFL career record with 81 interceptions, recorded over 16 seasons with the Washington Redskins and Minnesota Vikings between 1964 and 1979.

Night Train Lane 14 Rookie Interceptions

Rookie cornerback Dick 'Night Train' Lane established the NFL single-season record by intercepting 14 passes in just 12 games for the Los Angeles Rams in 1952, a record that has stood for over 70 years.

Ed Reed Longest Interception Returns

Baltimore Ravens safety Ed Reed holds the two longest interception returns in NFL history, returning a pick 106 yards for a touchdown against Cleveland in 2004, then breaking his own record with a 107-yard return against Philadelphia in 2008.

Ray Lewis 2x Defensive Player of the Year

Middle linebacker Ray Lewis captained the Baltimore Ravens for 17 seasons, winning two Defensive Player of the Year awards, MVP of Super Bowl XXXV, and concluding his career with a victory in Super Bowl XLVII.

Ronnie Lott Amputated Pinky Finger

After suffering a severely crushed left pinky finger attempting to tackle Timmy Newsome in 1985, 49ers safety Ronnie Lott chose to have the tip amputated after the 1985 season to avoid prolonged surgery that would sideline him.

Mean Joe Greene Steel Curtain

Defensive tackle Joe 'Mean Joe' Greene anchored the Pittsburgh Steelers' legendary 'Steel Curtain' defense, winning two Defensive Player of the Year awards (1972, 1974) and four Super Bowl titles in the 1970s.

Aaron Donald 3x Defensive Player of the Year

Los Angeles Rams defensive tackle Aaron Donald tied Lawrence Taylor and J.J. Watt by winning three NFL Defensive Player of the Year awards (2017, 2018, 2020), totaling 111 career sacks and sealing Super Bowl LVI.

Key facts

> **The NFL's All-Time Rushing Legends**
> Emmitt Smith rushed for 18,355 career yards, the most in NFL history, over 15 seasons with Dallas and Arizona. Chicago's Walter Payton, nicknamed 'Sweetness,' retired with 16,726 rushing yards, and Cleveland's Jim Brown led the league in rushing in eight of his nine seasons, averaging 5.2 yards per carry.

Single-Season and Single-Game Rushing Records

Barry Sanders closed his 1997 MVP season with 14 consecutive 100-yard rushing games on his way to 2,053 yards. Eric Dickerson set the still-standing single-season rushing record with 2,105 yards in 1984, and as a rookie in 2007, Adrian Peterson rushed for 296 yards in a single game, the all-time NFL record.



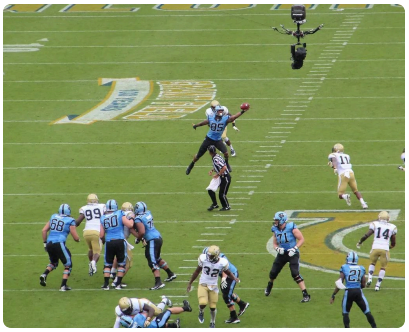
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NFL Touchdown Records

Jerry Rice scored 208 career touchdowns, an NFL record, over a Hall of Fame career played primarily with the San Francisco 49ers before stints with the Oakland Raiders and Seattle Seahawks. Randy Moss later set the single-season touchdown-catch record by hauling in 23 touchdown passes from Tom Brady in 2007, surpassing Rice's own 1987 mark of 22.

A Receiving Yardage Record and the Position's Pioneer

Detroit's Calvin 'Megatron' Johnson set the NFL single-season receiving yardage record with 1,964 yards on 122 receptions in 2012. Decades earlier, Green Bay's Don Hutson had revolutionized receiver route running, leading the league in receptions eight times and in receiving touchdowns nine times.



Thomson20192 (Openverse) · by 2.0

Tight End Record Holders

Tony Gonzalez caught 1,325 passes for 15,127 yards and 111 touchdowns across 17 seasons, the most receptions ever by a tight end. New England's Rob Gronkowski set the position's single-season touchdown record with 17 in 2011, and Kansas City's Travis Kelce became the first tight end to record seven consecutive 1,000-yard receiving seasons, from 2016 to 2022.

All-Purpose and Total Touchdown Records

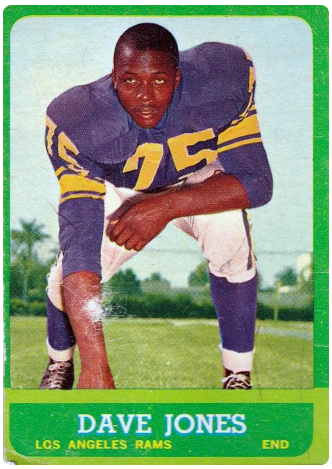
In 1999, St. Louis running back Marshall Faulk gained 1,381 rushing yards and 1,048 receiving yards, setting a then-record 2,429 yards from scrimmage in a single season. Seven years later, San Diego's LaDainian Tomlinson scored 31 total touchdowns, 28 rushing and 3 receiving, for an NFL single-season record 186 points in 2006.



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Defensive Honors and Versatility

Minnesota's Alan Page and New York's Lawrence Taylor remain the only two primarily defensive players ever named NFL Most Valuable Player, winning in 1971 and 1986 respectively. Deion Sanders is the only athlete to play in both a Super Bowl and a World Series, and Los Angeles Rams tackle Aaron Donald tied the record for career Defensive Player of the Year awards by winning three, in 2017, 2018, and 2020.

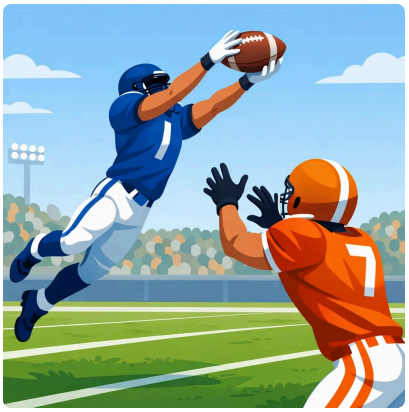


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The Origin of the Sack and Its All-Time Record

Los Angeles Rams defensive end Deacon Jones is credited with coining the term 'sack' to describe tackling a quarterback behind the line of scrimmage. Buffalo's Bruce Smith went on to become the NFL's all-time sack leader with exactly 200.0 career sacks from 1985 to 2003, with Reggie White, 'The Minister of Defense,' ranking second at 198.0.

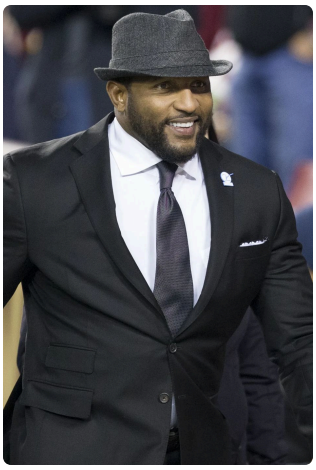
> ### Sack Records for a Season and a Single Game
>
> Cleveland's Myles Garrett set the NFL single-season sack record with 23.0 in 2025, passing the 22.5 that Michael Strahan set in 2001 and T.J. Watt matched in 2021. The single-game record belongs to Kansas City's Derrick Thomas, who sacked Seattle's Dave Krieg 7.0 times on November 11, 1990.



AI-generated (gpt-image-1.5)

The NFL's Interception Record Book

Rod Woodson scored 12 career interception-return touchdowns, an NFL record, among his 71 career interceptions. Paul Krause intercepted 81 passes over 16 seasons for the all-time career record, rookie Dick 'Night Train' Lane picked off 14 passes in just 12 games in 1952 for the single-season mark, and Baltimore's Ed Reed returned an interception 107 yards for a touchdown in 2008, the longest in NFL history.



Wikimedia Commons · Keith Allison · CC BY-SA 2.0

Defensive Toughness and Titles

Ravens linebacker Ray Lewis won two Super Bowls twelve years apart, earning MVP honors in Super Bowl XXXV and winning again in Super Bowl XLVII. 49ers safety Ronnie Lott had the tip of his left pinky finger amputated in 1986 rather than undergo surgery that would have sidelined him for the season.

By the numbers

How many career rushing yards did Emmitt Smith gain to set the all-time NFL record?

18355 yards

How many rushing titles did Jim Brown win in his nine NFL seasons with the Cleveland Browns?

8 titles

How many consecutive 100-yard rushing games did Barry Sanders record during his 2,053-yard 1997 co-MVP season?

14 games

What is Eric Dickerson's unbroken single-season NFL rushing record in yards set in 1984?

2105 yards

What is Adrian Peterson's all-time NFL single-game rushing record in yards set as a rookie in 2007?

296 yards

How many total career touchdowns did Jerry Rice score to establish the all-time NFL record?

208 touchdowns

How many touchdown receptions did Randy Moss catch in 2007 to set the single-season NFL record?

23 touchdowns

What is Calvin Johnson's standing single-season NFL receiving yards record set in 2012?

1964 yards

How many career receptions did Tony Gonzalez record to set the all-time NFL tight end mark?

1325 receptions

How many touchdown passes did Rob Gronkowski catch in 2011 to set the single-season tight end record?

17 touchdowns

How many consecutive 1,000-yard receiving seasons did Travis Kelce record from 2016 to 2022?

7 seasons

What is LaDainian Tomlinson's all-time NFL single-season record for total touchdowns scored in 2006?

31 touchdowns

How many career sacks did Reggie White ('The Minister of Defense') record in the NFL?

198 sacks

What is Bruce Smith's all-time official NFL career sack record?

200 sacks

What is the NFL single-season sack record, set by Myles Garrett in 2025?

23 sacks

How many sacks did Derrick Thomas record against Seattle on November 11, 1990, to set the single-game record?

7 sacks

How many career interception return touchdowns (pick-sixes) did Rod Woodson score to hold the NFL record?

12 touchdowns

What is Paul Krause's standing all-time NFL career interceptions record?

81 interceptions

How many interceptions did rookie Dick 'Night Train' Lane record in 12 games in 1952 for the all-time record?

14 interceptions

How many yards was Ed Reed's record-setting touchdown interception return against the Eagles in 2008?

107 yards

How many NFL Defensive Player of the Year awards did Aaron Donald win with the Rams to tie the all-time record?

3 awards

Matched pairs

Each item on the left goes with the one on the right.

Walter Payton
→ Nicknamed 'Sweetness,' retired with 16,726 rushing yards and a 275-yard single-game mark

Don Hutson
→ Revolutionized wide receiver route running, leading the NFL in receptions 8 times and receiving TDs 9 times

Marshall Faulk
→ Gained 1,381 rushing yards and 1,048 receiving yards in 1999, setting a then-record 2,429 scrimmage yards

Deacon Jones
→ Credited with coining the term 'sack' for tackling a quarterback behind the line of scrimmage

Ray Lewis
→ Won two Super Bowls 12 years apart with the Ravens (XXXV MVP and XLVII) and 2x Defensive Player of the Year

Mean Joe Greene
→ Anchored the Pittsburgh Steelers' 'Steel Curtain' defensive line, winning 4 Super Bowls in the 1970s

Self-test

Answer each question from memory, then check your work against the answer key.

1. Which running back set the NFL's all-time career rushing record with 18,355 yards?

A Emmitt Smith
B Jim Brown
C Barry Sanders
D Walter Payton

2. Which Hall of Fame running back set the single-game rushing record of 275 yards against the Vikings in 1977?

A Barry Sanders
B Walter Payton
C Jim Brown
D Emmitt Smith

3. How many rushing titles did Jim Brown win during his nine NFL seasons with Cleveland (1957-1965)?

A 9
B 5
C 6
D 8

4. Which running back closed his 1997 season, in which he shared the NFL MVP award, with 14 consecutive 100-yard rushing games on the way to 2,053 yards?

A Walter Payton
B Emmitt Smith
C Barry Sanders
D Jim Brown

5. Which running back's career rushing record of 16,726 yards did Emmitt Smith surpass to become the NFL's all-time leader?

A Barry Sanders
B Jim Brown
C Walter Payton
D Eric Dickerson

6. Which Los Angeles Rams defensive end is credited with coining the term 'sack' for tackling a quarterback behind the line of scrimmage?

A Bruce Smith
B Michael Strahan
C Reggie White
D Deacon Jones

7. How many career sacks did Buffalo's Bruce Smith record to become the NFL's all-time sack leader?

A 205
B 200
C 198
D 192

8. Which pass rusher ranks second all-time in career sacks, behind Bruce Smith?

A Reggie White
B Derrick Thomas
C Deacon Jones
D Michael Strahan

9. Which defensive player won NFL MVP in 1986, one of only two defensive players ever to win the award?

A Alan Page
B Ray Lewis
C Lawrence Taylor
D Aaron Donald

10. How many NFL Defensive Player of the Year awards did Aaron Donald win with the Rams, tying the all-time record?

A 3
B 5
C 2
D 4

Go deeper

WATCH 22,895 Yards 0:29 · YouTube
Jerry Rice played 20 seasons, mostly with the San Francisco 49ers.

WATCH Who Named the Sack 0:30 · YouTube
The word “sack” is credited to Deacon Jones of the Los Angeles Rams, in the 1960s.

ONLINE This lesson on the web flashfeedlearningapp.com/study-guides/american-football-trivia/record-breakers-skill-position-icons-and-defensive-juggernauts

STUDY American Football Trivia & Gridiron Lore in the FlashFeed app
flashfeedlearningapp.com/packs/american-football-trivia

LESSON 5 OF 6

Bizarre Plays, Miracle Moments, and Iconic Football Lore

Miracles, Hail Marys, and Improbable Endings · The Weird, The Wacky, and The Unbelievable

WHAT YOU'LL BE ABLE TO DO

- Recall football's miracle plays: the Immaculate Reception, Staubach's Hail Mary, the Music City Miracle, the Mile High Miracle, and the Holy Roller rule change.
- Recall the Ice Bowl's -13°F, the Fog Bowl's roughly 15-yard visibility, the Snowplow Game, the Heidi cutaway and the 1940 Bears nearly running out of footballs.

Lesson 5: Bizarre Plays, Miracle Moments, and Iconic Football Lore

Miracles, Hail Marys, and Improbable Endings

American football lore is replete with iconic miracle plays that defied probability, rewrote postseason outcomes, and birthed indelible gridiron vocabulary. The most famous single play in NFL history occurred on December 23, 1972, at Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Stadium in the AFC Divisional Playoff between the Steelers and Raiders. On fourth-and-10 with 22 seconds remaining, Terry Bradshaw's desperation pass deflected off either Jack Tatum or Frenchy Fuqua; rookie running back Franco Harris scooped the ball inches off the artificial turf and ran it in for the game-winning touchdown, a 60-yard scoring play, in the 'Immaculate Reception.'

The phrase 'Hail Mary' entered the national sports lexicon on December 28, 1975, when Dallas Cowboys quarterback Roger Staubach threw a 50-yard game-winning touchdown pass to Drew Pearson with 24 seconds left to defeat the Minnesota Vikings 17-14. When reporters asked him what he thought as the ball was in the air, Staubach answered, 'I closed my eyes and said a Hail Mary.'

Postseason drama has generated countless other miraculous finishes. On January 8, 2000, the Tennessee Titans executed the 'Music City Miracle' against the Buffalo Bills, when, after the Bills went ahead with 16 seconds left, Lorenzo Neal fielded the kickoff and handed it to Frank Wycheck, who threw a controversial across-the-field lateral to Kevin Dyson, who raced 75 yards for the winning touchdown with three seconds remaining. On January 10, 1982, Dwight Clark made 'The Catch' in the back of the Candlestick Park end zone on a pass from Joe Montana to dethrone the Cowboys.

Other miraculous finishes include the 1978 'Miracle at the Meadowlands,' where Giants quarterback Joe Pisarcik botched a handoff that Herman Edwards returned for a game-winning Eagles touchdown; DeSean Jackson's walk-off 65-yard punt return in the 2010 'Miracle at the New Meadowlands'; Stefon Diggs' 61-yard walk-off 'Minneapolis Miracle' in 2018; Joe Flacco's 70-yard 'Mile High Miracle' to Jacoby Jones in 2013; the 2018 'Miami Miracle' where Kenyan Drake eluded Rob Gronkowski on a multi-lateral

walk-off against the Patriots; and the 1978 'Holy Roller,' where Ken Stabler intentionally fumbled forward, prompting a 1979 rule change limiting fumble advances in the final two minutes.

Key Historical Concepts and Trivia Milestones

The Immaculate Reception

On December 23, 1972, Pittsburgh Steelers rookie fullback Franco Harris snatched a deflected fourth-down pass inches off the turf and ran it in for a 60-yard scoring play and the winning touchdown against the Oakland Raiders in the 'Immaculate Reception.'

Roger Staubach Popularizing the Hail Mary

Following a 50-yard game-winning playoff touchdown pass to Drew Pearson against the Vikings on December 28, 1975, Cowboys quarterback Roger Staubach told reporters he closed his eyes and said a 'Hail Mary.'

Music City Miracle Lateral

On January 8, 2000, Tennessee Titans tight end Frank Wycheck threw a cross-field lateral on a kickoff return to Kevin Dyson, who sprinted 75 yards for the game-winning touchdown to beat the Buffalo Bills 22-16.

Dwight Clark's The Catch

On January 10, 1982, San Francisco 49ers receiver Dwight Clark made a leaping fingertip grab of Joe Montana's six-yard pass with 51 seconds left to beat the Dallas Cowboys 28-27 in the NFC Championship Game.

Miracle at the Meadowlands 1978

On November 19, 1978, instead of taking a knee to seal a Giants victory, quarterback Joe Pisarcik botched a handoff to Larry Csonka; Philadelphia's Herman Edwards scooped the loose ball and ran 26 yards for the winning touchdown.

Miracle at the New Meadowlands 2010

On December 19, 2010, the Philadelphia Eagles scored 28 fourth-quarter points, capped by DeSean Jackson's 65-yard walk-off punt return touchdown as time expired to shock the New York Giants 38-31.

Minneapolis Miracle 2018

On January 14, 2018, Minnesota Vikings receiver Stefon Diggs hauled in a 61-yard walk-off touchdown pass from Case Keenum on the final play of the NFC Divisional Playoff after Saints safety Marcus Williams missed the tackle.

Mile High Miracle 2013

In freezing 13-degree weather in the 2012 AFC Divisional Playoff on January 12, 2013, Ravens quarterback Joe Flacco connected with Jacoby Jones on a 70-yard touchdown pass with 31 seconds left to force overtime and beat Denver 38-35.

Miami Miracle 2018

On December 9, 2018, the Miami Dolphins completed a 69-yard double-lateral play with no time remaining, as Kenyan Drake evaded safety Rob Gronkowski to score the walk-off touchdown in a 34-33 win over the Patriots.

Miracle in Motown 61-Yard Hail Mary

On December 3, 2015, Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers uncorked a 61-yard Hail Mary touchdown pass to tight end Richard Rodgers on an untimed final down following a facemask penalty to stun the Detroit Lions 27-23.

The Sea of Hands 1974

On December 21, 1974, Oakland Raiders running back Clarence Davis wrestled away an eight-yard touchdown pass from Ken Stabler amidst three surrounding Dolphins defenders with 26 seconds left to end Miami's quest for a three-peat.

The Holy Roller Fumble Forward

On September 10, 1978, Oakland Raiders quarterback Ken Stabler intentionally fumbled the ball forward while being sacked; it was batted by Pete Banaszak and recovered in the end zone by Dave Casper for a game-winning touchdown against the Chargers.

Holy Roller Rule Change

In response to the controversial 'Holy Roller' play, the NFL enacted a 1979 rule stipulating that on fourth down or in the final two minutes of a half, only the fumbling player can recover and advance an offensive fumble.

River City Relay Botched Extra Point

On December 21, 2003, the New Orleans Saints scored a miraculous 75-yard three-lateral touchdown with no time left against Jacksonville, only for reliable kicker John Carney to push the game-tying extra point wide right.

The Kick Six in the Iron Bowl

On November 30, 2013, Auburn cornerback Chris Davis caught a missed 57-yard field goal with one second remaining in the Iron Bowl and sprinted 109 yards down the sideline for a walk-off touchdown to upset #1 Alabama 34-28.

The Weird, The Wacky, and The Unbelievable

The archives of professional and collegiate football are filled with bizarre weather epics, administrative blunders, unforgettable gaffes, and surreal coincidences that defy ordinary sports logic. In the 1940 NFL Championship Game, George Halas's Chicago Bears dominated the Washington Redskins so thoroughly (73-0) that the officials asked Halas to stop kicking extra points because the team was running low on footballs after so many were booted into the Griffith Stadium stands.

Extreme weather has created legendary football lore. On New Year's Eve 1967, the Green Bay Packers and Dallas Cowboys clashed in 'The Ice Bowl' at Lambeau Field in minus-13 degree Fahrenheit temperatures with a minus-48 wind chill; Bart Starr's quarterback sneak with 13 seconds left secured the 21-17 victory on turf so frozen the referee's metal whistle froze to his lips. On December 31, 1988, Soldier Field was engulfed by 'The Fog Bowl,' a dense bank of fog that reduced visibility to roughly 15 to 20 yards during the Eagles-Bears playoff game. In December 1982, the Patriots defeated Miami in 'The Snowplow Game' after prison inmate Mark Henderson drove a tractor snowplow onto the field on a work-release program to clear a clean patch of turf for John Smith's winning field goal.

Bizarre rules and broadcasts have also shaped the game. On November 17, 1968, NBC cut away from a thrilling Jets-Raiders game with 65 seconds left to air the children's movie Heidi on schedule; Oakland scored two touchdowns in nine seconds to win 43-32 while viewers missed the ending, prompting NBC to install a dedicated emergency telephone ('The Heidi Phone'). In the January 2002 'Tuck Rule Game,' Tom Brady's apparent fourth-quarter fumble in a snowstorm was overturned under Rule 3, Section 22, Article 2, launching New England's championship run.

Iconic blunders have become permanent trivia staples: California center Roy 'Wrong-Way' Riegels running 65 yards toward his own end zone in the 1929 Rose Bowl; Minnesota Vikings defensive end Jim Marshall recovering a fumble and sprinting 66 yards the wrong way for a safety in 1964; Dallas Cowboys defensive tackle Leon Lett getting stripped from behind by Don Beebe at the goal line in Super Bowl XXVII and sliding into a blocked field goal on Thanksgiving 1993; New York Jets quarterback Mark Sanchez running into the backside of guard Brandon Moore for the 2012 Thanksgiving 'Butt Fumble'; Dan Orlovsky stepping out the back of his own end zone for an unintentional safety during Detroit's 0-16 season in 2008; and Justin Tucker's 66-yard field goal off the crossbar with no time left in 2021, the NFL record until Cam Little made a 68-yarder in November 2025.

Key Historical Concepts and Trivia Milestones

1940 Bears Running Out of Footballs

During their 73-0 championship victory in 1940, the Chicago Bears scored 11 touchdowns and kicked so many extra point balls into the Griffith Stadium bleachers that officials requested they pass for points after touchdown to conserve remaining game balls.

The Ice Bowl Minus 13 Degrees

The 1967 NFL Championship Game between Green Bay and Dallas on December 31, 1967, was played in -13°F (-25°C) temperatures with a -48°F wind chill, causing referee Norm Schachter's metal whistle to freeze to his lips.

The Fog Bowl 1988

On December 31, 1988, a massive fog bank rolled in from Lake Michigan over Chicago's Soldier Field during the second quarter of the Eagles-Bears playoff game, reducing visibility to roughly 15 to 20 yards for players and television cameras.

The Snowplow Game 1982

On December 12, 1982, during a scoreless blizzard between New England and Miami, Patriots coach Ron Meyer summoned convict Mark Henderson on a tractor snowplow to clear a clean spot for John Smith's winning 33-yard field goal.

The Tuck Rule Game 2002

On January 19, 2002, in a Foxboro snowstorm, Tom Brady's apparent fumble after being hit by Charles Woodson was overturned upon replay review under NFL Rule 3, Section 22, Article 2 (the Tuck Rule), allowing the Patriots to tie and win in overtime.

Wrong-Way Roy Riegels 1929

In the 1929 Rose Bowl, California center Roy Riegels scooped up a Georgia Tech fumble and became disoriented, running 65 yards toward his own end zone before teammate Benny Lom tackled him at the 1-yard line.

Bottlegate Game in Cleveland 2001

On December 16, 2001, referee Terry McAulay controversially halted play to review a fourth-down catch that had been ruled complete, after the Browns had already run another snap, and then reversed it to an incomplete pass, causing enraged Cleveland fans to pelt the field with thousands of plastic beer bottles.

The Heidi Game 1968

On November 17, 1968, NBC, after Jim Turner's field goal put the Jets up 32-29 with 1:05 left, switched its broadcast from the live Jets-Raiders game with about a minute remaining to air the television film Heidi; Oakland scored two touchdowns in nine seconds to win 43-32, causing massive public outrage.

The Heidi Phone Hotline

Following the disastrous public backlash of the 1968 Heidi broadcast, NBC installed a 'Heidi phone' in its Broadcast Operations Control, a hotline on a separate telephone exchange that stayed usable when switchboards were jammed, and changed its procedures so games would finish before other programming began.

Leon Lett Super Bowl & Thanksgiving Blunders

Dallas Cowboys defensive lineman Leon Lett prematurely celebrated a fumble return and was stripped from behind by Buffalo's Don Beebe at the 1-yard line in Super Bowl XXVII, and ten months later accidentally slid into a blocked field goal on Thanksgiving 1993 against Miami.

Jim Marshall 66-Yard Wrong-Way Safety

On October 25, 1964, Minnesota Vikings defensive end Jim Marshall recovered a 49ers fumble and sprinted 66 yards in the wrong direction, tossing the ball out of the back of his own end zone in celebration for a San Francisco safety.

Mark Sanchez Thanksgiving Butt Fumble

On Thanksgiving night, November 22, 2012, New York Jets quarterback Mark Sanchez collided with the backside of offensive guard Brandon Moore, fumbling the ball into the arms of New England safety Steve Gregory for a touchdown in the infamous 'Butt Fumble.'

Colts Disastrous 2015 Fake Punt

On October 18, 2015, the Indianapolis Colts shifted nine players to the far right sideline on fourth-and-3, with wide receiver Griff Whalen lined up as the snapper and safety Colt Anderson taking the snap in an illegal formation; Anderson was tackled for a loss against the Patriots.

Dan Orlovsky Unintentional Safety 2008

On October 12, 2008, Detroit Lions quarterback Dan Orlovsky rolled out to escape Minnesota defensive end Jared Allen and inadvertently stepped out of bounds through the back of his own end zone for a safety in a 12-10 loss.

Justin Tucker 66-Yard Field Goal Record

On September 26, 2021, Baltimore Ravens kicker Justin Tucker converted a 66-yard field goal that bounced high off the crossbar and through the uprights with no time remaining to defeat the Detroit Lions 19-17; it was the NFL record until Jaguars kicker Cam Little made a 68-yarder on November 2, 2025.

Key facts



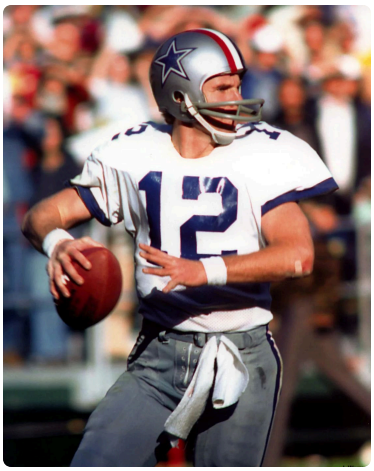
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Franco Harris and the 1972 Immaculate Reception

In the 1972 AFC Divisional Playoff, Franco Harris caught a ricocheted pass inches before the turf and ran for a game-winning 60-yard touchdown to shock the Raiders.

The 'Music City Miracle' Kickoff Return in 2000

With 16 seconds remaining in the 2000 Wild Card game, the Tennessee Titans executed a lateral across the field from Frank Wycheck to Kevin Dyson for a 75-yard kickoff touchdown.



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The Hail Mary, Then and Now

After throwing a 50-yard game-winning touchdown pass to Drew Pearson in a 1975 playoff game, Dallas quarterback Roger Staubach said he closed his eyes and threw a 'Hail Mary,' popularizing the term. Four decades later, Green Bay's Aaron Rodgers launched his own 61-yard Hail Mary touchdown pass on an untimed down to beat Detroit 27-23 in the 2015 'Miracle in Motown.'



Wikimedia Commons · Troy Kirby · CC BY 3.0

Miracle Finishes of the Late 1970s and Early 1980s

With 51 seconds left in the NFC Championship Game on January 10, 1982, 49ers receiver Dwight Clark leaped to snag a Joe Montana pass in the back of the end zone for 'The Catch.' Four years earlier, in 1978, Giants quarterback Joe Pisarcik had botched a handoff that Eagles cornerback Herman Edwards scooped up and returned 26 yards for the shocking game-winning score known as the Miracle at the Meadowlands.

A Decade of Walk-Off Miracles

In 2010, Philadelphia's DeSean Jackson fielded a punt and sprinted 65 yards for a walk-off touchdown as time expired. In the 2018 'Minneapolis Miracle,' Minnesota's Stefon Diggs caught a 61-yard walk-off touchdown as time expired, while five years earlier Baltimore's Joe Flacco had thrown a 70-yard touchdown to Jacoby Jones with 31 seconds left in the 'Mile High Miracle.' Later in 2018, Miami's Kenyan Drake scored a 69-yard walk-off touchdown in the 'Miami Miracle' after tight end Rob Gronkowski, playing emergency safety, stumbled trying to stop him.



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1970s Playoff Trick Plays and a Rule Change

With 26 seconds left in a 1974 playoff game, Oakland's Clarence Davis wrestled a Ken Stabler pass away from three Miami defenders for the winning touchdown. In the Raiders' 1978 'Holy Roller' play, tight end Dave Casper batted and fell on Stabler's intentionally fumbled ball in the end zone to beat San Diego, a play so controversial that the NFL passed a 1979 rule stating only the fumbling player can advance the ball inside the final two minutes of a half.



AI-generated (gpt-image-1.5)

Miraculous Endings With a Twist

After a 75-yard, three-lateral touchdown on the final play of a 2003 game, New Orleans kicker John Carney pushed the tying extra point wide right, and the Saints lost 20-19. Ten years later, on the final play of the 2013 Iron Bowl, Auburn's Chris Davis fielded a missed 57-yard field goal and returned it 109 yards for a touchdown to upset top-ranked Alabama 34-28.

The 28-3 Super Bowl LI Comeback

Trailing 28-3 in the third quarter of Super Bowl LI, the New England Patriots mounted the largest comeback in Super Bowl history, scoring 31 unanswered points to beat Atlanta 34-28 in overtime.

The 1978 'Holy Roller' Fumble Play

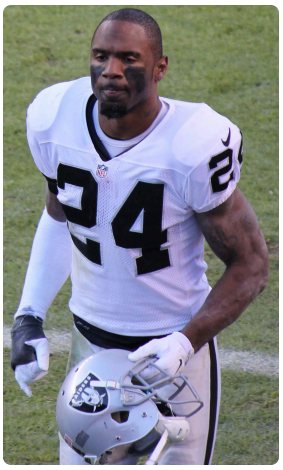
Oakland Raiders quarterback Ken Stabler intentionally fumbled forward toward the end zone against San Diego, leading to a game-winning touchdown and a 1979 rule change: on fourth down or in the final two minutes of a half, only the fumbling player may advance a fumble.

Football's Most Extreme Weather Games

During the Bears' record 73-0 rout in the 1940 NFL Championship, so many extra-point attempts sailed into the stands that officials asked Chicago to stop kicking them to conserve footballs. The 1967 'Ice Bowl' kicked off at an official -13°F with a wind chill near -48°F, freezing the referee's whistle to his lips, and a 1988 fog bank over Soldier Field reduced visibility to roughly 15 yards during the 'Fog Bowl.'

Strange Special-Teams and End-Zone Blunders

During a 1982 snowstorm, a Patriots grounds crew worker on prison work release drove a tractor snowplow onto the field to clear a spot for a game-winning field goal against Miami. In 2015, the Colts lined up a receiver at center on a fake punt that was snapped straight to a safety who was tackled immediately, and in 2008, winless Detroit's Dan Orlovsky stepped out of the back of his own end zone without realizing it for an automatic safety.



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Officiating Controversies

In the 2001 AFC Divisional Playoff, officials reversed an apparent Tom Brady fumble to an incomplete pass under the NFL's 'Tuck Rule' after Charles Woodson jarred the ball loose. In 2001's 'Bottlegate,' Cleveland fans pelted the field with beer bottles after a referee stopped play to review a pass that had occurred before the Browns already snapped the ball again.



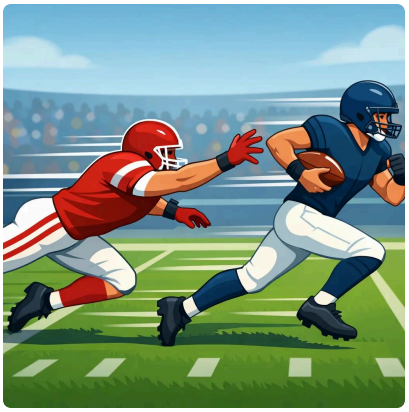
The Associated Press · Public domain

Football's Most Famous 'Wrong-Way' Runs

In the 1929 Rose Bowl, California's Roy 'Wrong-Way' Riegels recovered a fumble and ran 65 yards toward his own goal line before a teammate tackled him at the 1-yard line. In 1964, Minnesota's Jim Marshall repeated the mistake in the NFL, running 66 yards the wrong way before throwing the ball out of bounds for a safety.

The Heidi Game and the Heidi Phone

With about a minute left in a 1968 Jets-Raiders game, NBC cut away to broadcast the movie Heidi and missed Oakland score two touchdowns in nine seconds to win 43-32. The outcry led NBC to install a 'Heidi Phone,' a hotline on a separate exchange in its broadcast operations center, and to finish games before starting other programming.



AI-generated (gpt-image-1.5)

Hustle and Humiliation: Two Signature Blunders

In Super Bowl XXVII, Buffalo's Don Beebe chased down showboating Dallas defender Leon Lett from behind and knocked the ball out of his hand at the 1-yard line, turning a certain touchdown into a touchback. On Thanksgiving 2012, Jets quarterback Mark Sanchez ran directly into his own offensive lineman's backside, fumbling the ball for a Patriots touchdown in the 'Butt Fumble.'



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Justin Tucker's 66-Yard Field Goal

Baltimore kicker Justin Tucker drilled a 66-yard field goal that bounced off the crossbar and through as time expired in 2021, beating Detroit 19-17 and setting what was then the NFL record for longest converted field goal. Jaguars kicker Cam Little broke it with a 68-yarder on November 2, 2025.

By the numbers

How many yards was DeSean Jackson's walk-off punt return touchdown with 0:00 on the clock in 2010?

65 yards

How many yards was Stefon Diggs' walk-off touchdown catch in the 2018 'Minneapolis Miracle' against New Orleans?

61 yards

How many yards was Joe Flacco's game-tying touchdown pass to Jacoby Jones with 31 seconds left in Denver in 2013?

70 yards

How many yards was Aaron Rodgers' game-winning 'Miracle in Motown' Hail Mary to Richard Rodgers on an untimed down?

61 yards

How many yards did Auburn's Chris Davis return a missed field goal to win the 2013 Iron Bowl on the final play?

109 yards

What was the official air temperature in degrees Fahrenheit at kickoff for the 1967 'Ice Bowl' at Lambeau Field?

−13 degrees Fahrenheit

To how many yards was on-field visibility reduced when dense fog engulfed Soldier Field in the 1988 'Fog Bowl'?

15 yards

How many yards in the wrong direction did California's Roy Riegels run with a recovered fumble in the 1929 Rose Bowl?

65 yards

How many seconds were left when NBC cut away from the live Jets-Raiders game to air Heidi in 1968?

65 seconds

How many yards in the wrong direction did Jim Marshall run before tossing the ball out of bounds for a safety in 1964?

66 yards

How many yards was Justin Tucker's 2021 field goal that set the NFL's longest-made-kick record, since broken by Cam Little's 68-yarder in November 2025?

66 yards

Matched pairs

Each item on the left goes with the one on the right.

Dwight Clark

→ Made 'The Catch' in the back of the end zone on Joe Montana's pass with 51 seconds left in 1982

The Heidi Phone

→ Hotline NBC installed in its broadcast operations center, on a separate exchange that stayed usable when switchboards jammed

Self-test

Answer each question from memory, then check your work against the answer key.

1. Who caught the touchdown pass in Roger Staubach's famous 1975 'Hail Mary'?

A Richard Rodgers
B Drew Pearson
C Jacoby Jones
D Kevin Dyson

2. Which team did the Steelers face when Franco Harris made the 1972 'Immaculate Reception'?

A Oakland Raiders
B Minnesota Vikings
C Buffalo Bills
D Dallas Cowboys

3. How many yards did Kevin Dyson run after the lateral in the 2000 'Music City Miracle'?

A 61 yards
B 65 yards
C 75 yards
D 70 yards

4. Which quarterback threw the 2013 'Mile High Miracle' touchdown to Jacoby Jones?

A Joe Montana
B Aaron Rodgers
C Case Keenum
D Joe Flacco

5. What NFL rule change directly followed the 1978 'Holy Roller' play?

A Introduction of the tuck rule
B Late-game fumble-advance limit
C Permanent instant replay review
D Two-minute warning introduced

6. In December 1982's 'Snowplow Game', which team did the New England Patriots beat?

A Buffalo Bills
B Baltimore Colts
C New York Jets
D Miami Dolphins

7. What was the official kickoff temperature in Fahrenheit for the 1967 'Ice Bowl'?

A -20°F
B -48°F
C -13°F
D 15°F

8. To how many yards did fog reduce on-field visibility during the 1988 'Fog Bowl'?

A 15 yards
B 25 yards
C 50 yards
D 30 yards

9. During the Bears' 73-0 rout in the 1940 NFL Championship Game, what did officials ask them to do after touchdowns?

A Pass for the point after touchdown
B Kick from 10 yards farther back
C Let Washington supply the ball
D Use a heavier practice ball

10. About how many seconds remained when NBC cut away from the 1968 Jets-Raiders game to air Heidi?

A 24 seconds
B 51 seconds
C 31 seconds
D 65 seconds

Go deeper

WATCH The First Hail Mary 0:31 · YouTube
In a December 1975 playoff game, the Dallas Cowboys needed a miracle against the Minnesota Vikings.

WATCH The Heidi Game 0:31 · YouTube
On November 17, 1968, the Jets and the Raiders were in a close game, with 65 seconds left.

ONLINE This lesson on the web flashfeedlearningapp.com/study-guides/american-football-trivia/bizarre-plays-miracle-moments-and-iconic-football-lore

STUDY American Football Trivia & Gridiron Lore in the FlashFeed app
flashfeedlearningapp.com/packs/american-football-trivia

LESSON 6 OF 6

Strategy, Football Anatomy, College Traditions, and Tailgate Culture

Tactical Masterminds, Formations, and Gridiron Evolution · College Traditions, Heisman Lore, and Gridiron Culture

WHAT YOU'LL BE ABLE TO DO

- Recall football's tacticians and schemes: Shaughnessy's T-Formation, Mouse Davis's Run and Shoot, Tampa 2, LeBeau's Zone Blitz, and the 2008 Wildcat.
- Recall Heisman lore (created 1935, 45 pounds of bronze, Archie Griffin twice, Charles Woodson in 1997), The Play's five laterals, and the 12th Man.

Lesson 6: Strategy, Football Anatomy, College Traditions, and Tailgate Culture

Tactical Masterminds, Formations, and Gridiron Evolution

The tactical architecture of American football has continually evolved through a dynamic chess match between offensive innovators creating spatial leverage and defensive masterminds crafting schemes to disguise coverage and collapse protection. In the 1930s and 1940s, Stanford and Bears coach Clark Shaughnessy revitalized the T-Formation by placing the quarterback directly behind the center, utilizing a man in motion, and executing deceptive quick handoffs, helping reshape quarterback play.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Mouse Davis popularized the 'Run and Shoot' four-receiver spread offense at Portland State and in the USFL, pioneering pre-snap and post-snap option route adjustments that forced defenses to defend all 53.3 yards of field width. Defensively, Tony Dungy and Monte Kiffin created the famous 'Tampa 2' scheme with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in the late 1990s, using a fast middle linebacker (such as Hardy Nickerson or Shelton Quarles) to drop deep into the middle third between two Cover 2 safeties. Meanwhile, Dick LeBeau refined the 'Zone Blitz' (Fire Zone) in Cincinnati and made it famous as Pittsburgh Steelers defensive coordinator, dropping athletic defensive linemen into short passing lanes while blitzing cornerbacks and safeties from unpredictable angles.

Modern tactical explosions include the 2008 Miami Dolphins' 'Wildcat Offense,' where running back Ronnie Brown took direct snaps in an unbalanced line to shock the New England Patriots as Brown accounted for five touchdowns (four rushing, one passing); the Run-Pass Option (RPO) revolution, giving quarterbacks post-snap reads to hand off or throw; the iconic 'Philly Special' trick play on fourth-and-goal in Super Bowl LII, where Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Nick Foles caught a touchdown pass from tight end Trey Burton; and the Eagles' highly successful 'Brotherly Shove' / 'Tush Push' short-yardage quarterback sneak.

Rule evolutions have reshaped the game. In 1978, the NFL enacted the 'Mel Blount Rule,' prohibiting defenders from making contact with receivers beyond five yards from the line of scrimmage, while simultaneously permitting offensive linemen to extend arms and use open hands to pass block. The two-point conversion was introduced to the modern NFL in 1994. Equipment specifications are equally exacting: every official NFL football ('The Duke') is hand-sewn by Wilson Sporting Goods in Ada, Ohio, measuring 11 to 11.25 inches long, 28 to 28.5 inches in long circumference, and weighing 14 to 15 ounces inflated between 12.5 and 13.5 psi. Goalposts sit with the crossbar exactly 10 feet above ground with uprights 18 feet 6 inches wide, moved to the rear of the end zone in 1974.

Key Historical Concepts and Trivia Milestones

Clark Shaughnessy T-Formation

Coach Clark Shaughnessy revitalized the T-Formation in 1940 by placing the quarterback directly under center with a halfback in pre-snap motion, creating the foundational template for modern offensive football.

Mouse Davis Run and Shoot

Coach Mouse Davis popularized and refined the four-wide receiver 'Run and Shoot' offense (conceived earlier by Glenn 'Tiger' Ellison) at Portland State in the late 1970s, which relied on receivers reading defensive coverages on the fly and altering their pass routes mid-play.

Tony Dungy Tampa 2 Defense

Tampa Bay Buccaneers head coach Tony Dungy and defensive coordinator Monte Kiffin created the 'Tampa 2' defensive scheme, featuring a Cover 2 shell where the middle linebacker drops deep downfield between the two deep safeties.

Dick LeBeau Zone Blitz

Dick LeBeau refined the 'Zone Blitz' (Fire Zone) concept as Cincinnati's defensive coordinator and made it famous with the Pittsburgh Steelers, creating mass confusion by having defensive ends drop into pass coverage while safeties and cornerbacks blitzed the quarterback.

Miami Dolphins Wildcat Offense

On September 21, 2008, the Miami Dolphins unleashed the 'Wildcat Offense' with direct snaps to running back Ronnie Brown from an unbalanced line, routing the New England Patriots 38-13 with Brown accounting for five touchdowns (four rushing, one passing).

Run-Pass Option (RPO) Mechanics

The Run-Pass Option (RPO) creates an un-defendable spatial dilemma by marrying run-blocking schemes with quick passing routes, allowing the quarterback to read a single defender post-snap before

deciding whether to hand off or pass.

The Philly Special in Super Bowl LII

On fourth-and-goal with 38 seconds remaining in the second quarter of Super Bowl LII, Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Nick Foles caught a 1-yard touchdown pass from tight end Trey Burton on the trick play known as the 'Philly Special.'

The Brotherly Shove / Tush Push

The Philadelphia Eagles popularized the 'Brotherly Shove' (Tush Push) quarterback sneak in 2022-2023, utilizing two trailing players to physically propel quarterback Jalen Hurts behind center Jason Kelce, converting about 93% of attempts in 2022 (25 of 27, per ESPN) and 83% in 2023 (35 of 42), with the rate lower in later seasons.

Bill Arnsparger 3-4 Defense

Miami Dolphins defensive coordinator Bill Arnsparger built the '53' defense, a forerunner of the modern 3-4 with three down linemen and four linebackers, for the early-1970s 'No-Name Defense'; his 1982 unit was known as the 'Killer B's.'

1978 Mel Blount Rule

In 1978, the NFL instituted the 'Mel Blount Rule' (illegal contact beyond five yards from the line of scrimmage) and permitted open-handed blocking for offensive linemen, unlocking a revolutionary modern era of aerial passing.

1978 Open-Hand Blocking Changes

Along with illegal contact restrictions, the 1978 rule revisions allowed offensive linemen to extend their arms and use open hands to block, dramatically reducing holding penalties and bolstering quarterback pass protection.

Two-Point Conversion in Modern NFL

The NFL officially adopted the two-point conversion option in 1994, bringing back a scoring rule that had been a staple of the American Football League throughout its existence from 1960 to 1969.

The Duke Wilson Factory in Ada, Ohio

Every official NFL game football, nicknamed 'The Duke' in honor of longtime Giants owner Wellington Mara (son of the team's founder, Tim Mara), is handcrafted from Horween leather by Wilson Sporting Goods factory workers in Ada, Ohio. Wilson has supplied the NFL's official ball since 1941 and has made its footballs in Ada since 1955.

NFL Football Dimensions and Specs

Official NFL specifications dictate that a game football must measure 11 to 11.25 inches in length, 28 to 28.5 inches in long circumference, weigh 14 to 15 ounces, and be inflated to a pressure of 12.5 to 13.5 pounds per square inch (psi).

Goalpost Height and Position

NFL goalpost crossbars are positioned exactly 10 feet above the field with uprights 18 feet 6 inches apart; they were permanently relocated from the goal line to the rear end line of the end zone in 1974 to enhance player safety.

College Traditions, Heisman Lore, and Gridiron Culture

The cultural heartbeat of American football extends far beyond professional stadiums into college towns, campus rivalry rituals, sacred awards, and tailgating traditions. The sport's most prestigious individual award, the Heisman Memorial Trophy, was created in 1935 by New York's Downtown Athletic Club (initially named the DAC Trophy) and renamed in 1936 to honor legendary collegiate coach John W. Heisman. Sculpted by Frank Eliscu and modeled after NYU running back Ed Smith, the 45-pound cast bronze statuette depicts a football player executing an iconic, fierce stiff-arm.

Heisman lore is filled with unmatched milestones. Ohio State running back Archie Griffin made history by winning the Heisman Trophy twice (in 1974 and 1975), remaining the only two-time recipient in history. In 1997, Michigan cornerback Charles Woodson became the first primarily defensive player to capture the Heisman Trophy; Colorado's two-way cornerback and receiver Travis Hunter followed in 2024.

Collegiate football rivalries have produced immortal moments. On November 20, 1982, in the 85th Big Game between Cal and Stanford, the Golden Bears executed five desperate lateral passes on a final kickoff return, racing through the Stanford marching band that had mistakenly rushed the field; Cal's Kevin Moen scored the walk-off touchdown in the south end zone, running into Stanford trombonist Gary Tyrrell as he did in 'The Play.' The Army-Navy Game, first played in 1890 and held every year since 1930, stands as one of sports' most sacred traditions, traditionally ending the college football regular season with both academies singing their alma maters together on the field.

Other cherished campus rituals include Clemson players rubbing Howard's Rock—a rock from California's Death Valley placed at Memorial Stadium in 1966 (players began rubbing it in 1967)—before sprinting down the hill; Notre Dame painting its iconic gold helmets with real 23.9-karat gold dust to mirror the Golden Dome atop campus; and Texas A&M's '12th Man' tradition, founded in 1922 when student E. King Gill stood ready in uniform on the sideline to play if his team ran out of healthy players.

In professional folklore, the 'Lambeau Leap' was born on December 26, 1993, when Green Bay Packers safety LeRoy Butler scored on a fumble return and leaped into the arms of fans in the south bleachers. The celebratory 'Gatorade Shower' began in 1984, when Giants nose tackle Jim Burt doused Bill Parcells (October 28) and Bears players doused Mike Ditka (November 25). The Green Bay Packers stand as the

only non-profit, community-owned franchise in major American professional sports, with over 537,000 shareholders as of the 2021-22 stock sale. Culturally, Super Bowl Sunday ranks as America's second-largest food consumption holiday after Thanksgiving, with the National Chicken Council's recent projections putting Super Bowl weekend wing consumption at roughly 1.4 to 1.5 billion wings.

Key Historical Concepts and Trivia Milestones

Heisman Trophy Creation in 1935

The Downtown Athletic Club established its annual collegiate football award in 1935, renaming it the Heisman Memorial Trophy in 1936 following the death of its athletic director and pioneering football coach John W. Heisman.

Heisman Trophy Bronze Stiff-Arm Model

Sculptor Frank Eliscu designed the 45-pound cast bronze Heisman Trophy in 1935 using New York University running back Ed Smith as his live model to capture a football player delivering a classic stiff-arm.

Archie Griffin Only Two-Time Heisman Winner

Ohio State Buckeyes running back Archie Griffin made history by winning the Heisman Trophy in both 1974 and 1975, remaining the only two-time Heisman winner in the history of college football.

Charles Woodson Defensive Heisman

In 1997, Michigan Wolverines cornerback and return specialist Charles Woodson became the first primarily defensive player to win the Heisman Trophy (Colorado two-way star Travis Hunter followed in 2024), beating out Tennessee quarterback Peyton Manning.

The Play Cal-Stanford 1982

On November 20, 1982, California scored a miraculous walk-off touchdown against Stanford in 'The Play' after completing five desperate laterals through the Stanford marching band, which had prematurely stormed the field.

Kevin Moen Trombone Collision

Cal ballcarrier Kevin Moen crossed the goal line for the winning touchdown in 'The Play' and immediately crashed into Stanford band trombonist Gary Tyrrell, who was standing in the end zone playing his instrument.

Army-Navy Game Tradition

First played on November 29, 1890, the annual Army-Navy Game represents one of the most storied rivalries in sports, concluding with both service academies standing together on the field to sing 'Navy Blue and Gold' and the West Point Alma Mater.

Howard's Rock at Clemson

Clemson Tigers football players rub Howard's Rock, a rock from California's Death Valley mounted atop the Memorial Stadium hill in 1966 (players began rubbing it in 1967), before sprinting down the hill in 'The Most Exciting 25 Seconds in College Football.'

Notre Dame Gold Helmets

Notre Dame's famous gold football helmets were historically painted by student managers using real gold dust; Notre Dame says its helmet paint contains 23.9-karat gold, including flakes collected during regilding of the Golden Dome atop the Main Building.

LeRoy Butler Lambeau Leap 1993

On December 26, 1993, Green Bay Packers safety LeRoy Butler recovered a Reggie White lateral after a fumble and leaped into the south bleachers among fans, originating the beloved NFL celebration known as the 'Lambeau Leap.'

Gatorade Shower Origin

The tradition of dumping an ice-cold cooler of Gatorade over a victorious head coach began in 1984 with the New York Giants on Bill Parcells (Jim Burt, October 28) and the Chicago Bears on Mike Ditka (Dan Hampton, November 25), and was popularized by the Giants' Harry Carson.

Packers Public Ownership Structure

The Green Bay Packers are the only nonprofit, community-owned franchise in major American professional sports, owned by more than 537,000 shareholders (as of 2022) holding over 5.2 million shares across six stock sales.

Texas A&M 12th Man Tradition

The 12th Man tradition began on January 2, 1922, during the Dixie Classic, when Texas A&M student E. King Gill was called from the press box to put on a uniform and stand on the sideline ready to play as injuries mounted.

Super Bowl Food Consumption Records

Super Bowl Sunday ranks as the second-largest food consumption event in the United States after Thanksgiving Day, with the National Chicken Council's recent projections putting Super Bowl weekend wing consumption at roughly 1.4 to 1.5 billion wings.

Hall of Fame Game in Canton, Ohio

The NFL preseason officially begins each summer, in late July or early August, with the annual Pro Football Hall of Fame Game, played at Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium in Canton, Ohio, adjacent to the museum during enshrinement week.

Key facts

Regulation Football Field Dimensions and Hash Marks

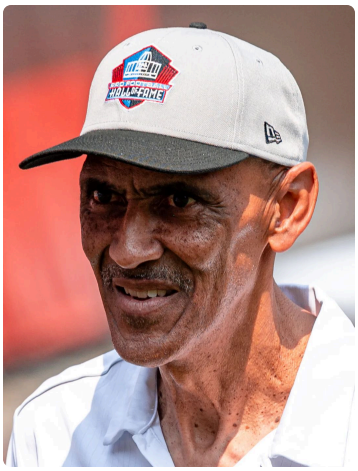
An NFL field measures 120 yards long (including two 10-yard end zones) by 53⅓ yards wide, with goalposts positioned 18 feet 6 inches apart at the end line.

The 1978 Mel Blount Rule and Pass Interference

In 1978, the NFL restricted defensive contact with receivers beyond five yards from the line of scrimmage, opening up modern aerial passing offenses.

Offensive Scheme Pioneers

In 1940, Clark Shaughnessy modernized the T-formation at Stanford and as a Bears consultant, using a man in motion and a quarterback taking the snap directly from center, helping reshape quarterback play. Decades later, coach Mouse Davis popularized the four-receiver 'Run and Shoot' offense, an idea Glenn 'Tiger' Ellison had conceived, built around receivers reading the defense and adjusting their routes on the fly.



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Defensive Scheme Innovators

In Tony Dungy and Monte Kiffin's 'Tampa 2' scheme, the middle linebacker drops deep into pass coverage between the two safeties. Dick LeBeau refined the 'Zone Blitz' with the Bengals, dropping defensive linemen into coverage while blitzing defensive backs, and made it famous as Pittsburgh's defensive coordinator, while Miami's Bill Arnsparger built the '53' defense, a forerunner of the 3-4 (three down linemen, four linebackers), for the Dolphins' 'No-Name Defense.'



AI-generated (gpt-image-1.5)

Modern Trick Plays and Short-Yardage Tactics

In 2008, Miami running back Ronnie Brown scored five total touchdowns out of the direct-snap 'Wildcat' formation as the Dolphins upset New England 38-13. Ten years later, Eagles tight end Trey Burton threw a touchdown pass to quarterback Nick Foles on the trick play known as the 'Philly Special' in Super Bowl LII, and in 2022 Philadelphia converted more than 90% of its attempts with the 'Brotherly Shove' quarterback sneak.



AI-generated (gpt-image-1.5)

What Makes a True Run-Pass Option

In a true Run-Pass Option, the offensive line blocks as if running the ball while the quarterback reads an unblocked defender in real time after the snap, deciding whether to hand off or throw. That live post-snap read is what separates an RPO from a traditional play-action fake, where the run is only faked from the start.

Rules That Reshaped Scoring and Blocking

Before 1978, NFL offensive linemen had to pass-block with closed fists held tight to their chests; that year's rule change legalized open hands and extended arms, helping fuel the modern passing game. The NFL officially adopted the two-point conversion in 1994, a play that had already been a staple of the American Football League from 1960 to 1969.

NFL Equipment and Field Specifications

Every official NFL game ball, nicknamed 'The Duke,' is handcrafted by Wilson Sporting Goods at its factory in Ada, Ohio, where Wilson has made footballs since 1955 (it has supplied the NFL's ball since 1941), and must weigh between 14 and 15 ounces. An NFL goalpost's crossbar sits exactly 10 feet above the playing surface, with the uprights spaced 18 feet 6 inches apart.



Erik Drost · CC BY 2.0

The Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio

Established in 1963 in Canton, Ohio, the Pro Football Hall of Fame enshrines the players, coaches, and contributors who defined the history of professional football.



Tech. Sgt. Steve Horton, U.S. Air Force · Public domain

Super Bowl Sunday as an American National Event

The Super Bowl evolved into the most-watched annual broadcast in the United States, celebrated for high-profile halftime concerts and multi-million-dollar commercials.



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The Heisman Trophy: Origins and Record Winners

The Downtown Athletic Club created college football's top individual award in 1935, renaming it for coach John W. Heisman in 1936; the cast bronze trophy weighs 45 pounds. Ohio State's Archie Griffin remains the only two-time winner, taking the award in both 1974 and 1975, and Michigan cornerback Charles Woodson became the first primarily defensive player to win it, in 1997; Colorado two-way star Travis Hunter followed in 2024.



AI-generated (gpt-image-1.5)

'The Play': Cal's Five-Lateral Kickoff Return

In the final seconds of a 1982 game against Stanford, California completed five backward laterals on the final kickoff return, with Kevin Moen scoring the winning touchdown by crashing through the Stanford band in the end zone. Band member Gary Tyrrell, playing trombone at the time, was famously bowled over by Moen as he scored.

> **College Football's Enduring Traditions**
>
> The Army-Navy Game was first played in 1890 and has been held every year since 1930; it ends with both teams standing together on the field as each school's alma mater is sung, the loser's first. Clemson mounted 'Howard's Rock,' brought from Death Valley, California, on the stadium hill in 1966, and players have rubbed it before running down the hill since 1967. Notre Dame's equipment managers historically mixed 23.9-karat gold dust into the paint for the team's iconic gold helmets.

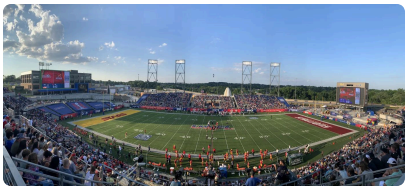


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Football's Signature Celebrations

Green Bay safety LeRoy Butler jumped into the Lambeau Field stands after a touchdown on December 26, 1993, creating the celebration known as the 'Lambeau Leap.' The Gatorade shower began in 1984: Giants lineman Jim Burt doused coach Bill Parcells on October 28, and Bears players doused Mike Ditka a month later; Harry Carson helped popularize it with the Giants.

> **Football's Unique Business and Culture Numbers**
>
> The Green Bay Packers are owned by more than 537,000 individual shareholders holding over 5.2 million shares, the only publicly owned major professional sports franchise in the United States. On a very different scale, the National Chicken Council's recent projections put Americans' Super Bowl weekend chicken wing consumption at roughly 1.4 to 1.5 billion wings; Super Bowl Sunday is often ranked second only to Thanksgiving for food consumption.



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Landmark Traditions: The 12th Man and the Hall of Fame Game

During the 1922 Dixie Classic, Texas A&M student E. King Gill came down from the press box to suit up when the Aggies ran short of healthy players, founding the school's '12th Man' tradition. Each summer, in late July or early August, the NFL kicks off its preseason with the Hall of Fame Game at Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium in Canton, Ohio, next to the Pro Football Hall of Fame museum.

By the numbers

How many total touchdowns (rushing and passing) did Ronnie Brown account for using the Wildcat direct-snap offense against New England in 2008?

5 touchdowns

In 2022, about what percentage of its 'Brotherly Shove' (Tush Push) attempts did the Philadelphia Eagles convert, per ESPN's count?

93 percent

How many yards beyond the line of scrimmage does the 1978 Mel Blount Rule prohibit defensive contact with receivers?

5 yards

In what year did the modern NFL officially adopt the two-point conversion rule?
1994 year

What is the maximum regulation weight in ounces for an official NFL game football?
15 ounces

How many feet above the playing surface is the crossbar on official NFL goalposts?
10 feet

In what year was the Heisman Trophy created by the Downtown Athletic Club (initially named the DAC Trophy)?
1935 year

How many pounds of cast bronze does the official Heisman Memorial Trophy weigh?
45 pounds

How many lateral passes did Cal complete through the Stanford band to score the winning touchdown in 'The Play' in 1982?
5 laterals

How many individual shareholders own the non-profit, community-owned Green Bay Packers?
537000 shareholders

About how many billion chicken wings does the National Chicken Council project Americans eat over Super Bowl weekend in a typical recent year?
1.45 billion wings

Matched pairs

Each item on the left goes with the one on the right.

Clark Shaughnessy
→ Modernized the T-Formation with a man in motion and quarterback under center in 1940

Mouse Davis
→ Popularized the four-wide receiver 'Run and Shoot' offense, built on receivers reading coverage and adjusting routes on the fly

Dick LeBeau
→ Refined the 'Zone Blitz' (Fire Zone) and made it famous with the Steelers, dropping defensive linemen into coverage while blitzing defensive backs

Bill Arnsparger
→ Built the '53' defense, a forerunner of the 3-4 (3 down linemen, 4 linebackers), for Miami's 'No-Name' defense

The Army-Navy Game

→ First played in 1890 and held every year since 1930, concluding with both service academies standing together on the field as each school's alma mater is sung

Self-test

Answer each question from memory, then check your work against the answer key.

1. Which coach modernized the T-Formation in 1940 by putting the quarterback under center and adding a man in motion?

A Mouse Davis
B Clark Shaughnessy
C Dick LeBeau
D Tony Dungy

2. Which coach popularized the four-receiver 'Run and Shoot' spread offense at Portland State and in the USFL?

A Bill Arnsparger
B Tony Dungy
C Clark Shaughnessy
D Mouse Davis

3. Which scheme features a fast middle linebacker dropping deep into the middle third between two safeties?

A Run and Shoot
B 3-4 Defense
C Tampa 2
D Zone Blitz

4. Which defensive coordinator refined the 'Zone Blitz' (Fire Zone) in Cincinnati and made it famous as the Pittsburgh Steelers' coordinator?

A Dick LeBeau
B Monte Kiffin
C Bill Arnsparger
D Tony Dungy

5. Which running back took direct snaps out of the 2008 Wildcat Offense to help upset the Patriots?

A Frank Gore
B Adrian Peterson
C Ronnie Brown
D Jamaal Charles

6. In what year did the Downtown Athletic Club create college football's top individual award (later the Heisman)?

A 1936
B 1935
C 1963
D 1994

7. How many pounds of cast bronze does the official Heisman Memorial Trophy weigh?

A 45 lbs
B 25 lbs
C 55 lbs
D 35 lbs

8. Which college football player is the only two-time winner of the Heisman Trophy?

A Charles Woodson
B Johnny Manziel
C Tim Tebow
D Archie Griffin

9. How many backward laterals did California complete on the winning kickoff return against Stanford in 1982's 'The Play'?

A 6 laterals
B 4 laterals
C 3 laterals
D 5 laterals

10. A student left the press box to suit up when his team ran short of healthy players in the 1922 Dixie Classic, founding which tradition?

A The 12th Man
B Howard's Rock
C Lambeau Leap
D Gatorade Shower

Go deeper

WATCH The Duke 0:30 · YouTube
Every official NFL game ball is made by hand in one Ohio town: Ada. They have been made there since 1955.

WATCH The Play 0:29 · YouTube
November 20, 1982: the Big Game, Cal against Stanford.

ONLINE This lesson on the web flashfeedlearningapp.com/study-guides/american-football-trivia/strategy-football-anatomy-college-traditions-and-tailgate-culture

STUDY American Football Trivia & Gridiron Lore in the FlashFeed app
flashfeedlearningapp.com/packs/american-football-trivia

Answer key

Lesson 1: Origins, Gridiron Pioneers, and Legendary Firsts

1. C Rutgers and Princeton

Rutgers defeated Princeton 6-4 on November 6, 1869, in New Brunswick, in the first intercollegiate football game.

2. D Walter Camp

Walter Camp, a Yale undergraduate, authored these rules between 1880 and 1883, earning him this nickname.

3. A $500

Heffelfinger accepted $500 from the Allegheny Athletic Association, the first documented pro football payment.

4. B Reduce fatal mass-momentum collisions

A wave of deaths from mass-momentum plays (about 19 in 1905 by one count) pushed committees to open the field with the forward pass.

5. D Jim Thorpe

Olympic star Jim Thorpe was elected the APFA's first president at the 1920 Canton meeting.

6. B First African-American head coach in NFL history

Fritz Pollard became the NFL's first African-American head coach with the Akron Pros in 1921.

7. C The Galloping Ghost

Grange became 'The Galloping Ghost' after his four-touchdown performance against Michigan in 1924.

8. A Kenny Washington and Woody Strode

The Rams signed Kenny Washington and Woody Strode in 1946, ending the NFL's 13-year color barrier.

9. D 73-0

The Bears' 73-0 win remains the most lopsided championship game in NFL history.

10. C Game film study and printed playbooks

Paul Brown pioneered systematic game film study and printed playbooks that reshaped team preparation.

Lesson 2: The Super Bowl Era and Iconic Championship Clashes

1. C 8

The AFL launched in 1959 with eight original franchise owners, including Lamar Hunt, who dubbed themselves 'The Foolish Club.'

2. A A Wham-O Super Ball toy

Hunt named it after watching his kids play with a Wham-O 'Super Ball,' replacing the clunky 'AFL-NFL World Championship Game.'

3. B 35-10

Vince Lombardi's Packers routed Hank Stram's Chiefs 35-10 on January 15, 1967, at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

4. D Max McGee

Reserve receiver Max McGee delivered a heroic performance in Super Bowl I despite being out late the night before.

5. A Sudden-death overtime

The AFL is credited with scoreboard clocks, two-point conversions, and jersey-back names, not sudden-death overtime.

6. D 17-0

Don Shula's 1972 Dolphins finished 17-0, the NFL's only perfect, undefeated and untied season ending in a title.

7. C Chuck Noll

Chuck Noll coached the 1970s Steelers dynasty, built around the 'Steel Curtain' defense of Greene, Lambert, and Blount.

8. B 335 lbs

Perry, the 1985 Bears' oversized rookie defensive tackle, weighed 335 pounds during Super Bowl XX.

9. D Bill Walsh

Bill Walsh designed the West Coast Offense around short, rhythmic, timing-based passing that reshaped modern offenses.

10. A Doug Plank

Doug Plank was a Chicago Bears safety; the Steel Curtain famously featured Joe Greene, Jack Lambert, and Mel Blount.

Lesson 3: Legendary Quarterbacks, Gunslingers, and Field Generals

1. B 47 games

Unitas's 47-game TD streak (1956-1960) stood until Drew Brees broke it with 54 games in 2012; 297 is Favre's separate start streak.

2. C Dan Marino

Dan Marino's 1984 season with the Dolphins was the first to top 5,000 passing yards, with 48 touchdown passes.

3. A 297

Favre's regular-season streak was 297 games; 321 includes his playoff starts.

4. D Dan Fouts

Dan Fouts ran Don Coryell's vertical passing attack in San Diego, topping the league in yards from 1979 through 1982.

5. D 2010

Manning's MVP years were 2003, 2004, 2008, 2009, and 2013 -- he did not win the award in 2010.

6. C 199

Brady was picked 199th overall in the sixth round, one of the most famous 'steals' in draft history.

7. B Fran Tarkenton

Fran Tarkenton pioneered the mobile, scrambling quarterback archetype for Minnesota, retiring with those career marks.

8. A Won Super Bowl MVP honors

Blanda is known for longevity (26 seasons, retiring at 48) and 2,002 career points -- not for a Super Bowl MVP award.

9. C 75

Newton's 75 career rushing touchdowns were the quarterback record until Josh Allen passed him in 2025; 55, 48, and 26 are single-season passing-TD marks from other quarterbacks.

10. D Steve Young

Steve Young threw six touchdowns against San Diego in Super Bowl XXIX, breaking Joe Montana's prior record of five.

Lesson 4: Record Breakers, Skill Position Icons, and Defensive Juggernauts

1. A Emmitt Smith

Emmitt Smith rushed for 18,355 career yards over 15 seasons with Dallas and Arizona, the NFL's all-time record, ahead of Payton (16,726) and Sanders (15,269).

2. B Walter Payton

Walter Payton, nicknamed 'Sweetness,' ran for 275 yards against Minnesota while battling flu symptoms, a single-game record at the time.

3. D 8

Jim Brown won eight rushing titles in his nine seasons, an unmatched mark of dominance at the position.

4. C Barry Sanders

Barry Sanders strung together 14 straight 100-yard games during his 2,053-yard 1997 campaign for Detroit.

5. C Walter Payton

Emmitt Smith broke Walter Payton's career mark of 16,726 rushing yards, set during Payton's Hall of Fame run with the Bears, to become the NFL's all-time rushing leader.

6. D Deacon Jones

Deacon Jones is credited with originating the term 'sack' to describe dropping a quarterback behind the line of scrimmage.

7. B 200

Bruce Smith retired with exactly 200.0 career sacks from 1985 to 2003, the all-time NFL record.

8. A Reggie White

Reggie White, 'The Minister of Defense,' ranks second all-time in career sacks behind Bruce Smith's 200.0.

9. C Lawrence Taylor

Lawrence Taylor won NFL MVP in 1986; Alan Page is the only other primarily defensive player to win it, in 1971.

10. A 3

Aaron Donald won three Defensive Player of the Year awards with the Rams, tying the all-time record.

Lesson 5: Bizarre Plays, Miracle Moments, and Iconic Football Lore

1. B Drew Pearson

Staubach's 1975 Hail Mary touchdown pass went to Drew Pearson; Dyson, Jones, and Richard Rodgers caught other miracle touchdowns.

2. A Oakland Raiders

Franco Harris's Immaculate Reception came in the 1972 AFC Divisional Playoff between the Steelers and the Raiders, not the Bills, Vikings, or Cowboys.

3. C 75 yards

Kevin Dyson ran 75 yards after Frank Wycheck's lateral to complete the 2000 Music City Miracle; the other yardages belong to different miracle plays.

4. D Joe Flacco

Joe Flacco threw the 70-yard Mile High Miracle touchdown to Jacoby Jones in 2013; the other quarterbacks threw different miracle touchdowns.

5. B Late-game fumble-advance limit

The Holy Roller's intentional fumble led to a 1979 rule limiting fumble advances in the final two minutes, not the tuck rule, replay review, or the two-minute warning.

6. D Miami Dolphins

The Patriots beat Miami in the 1982 Snowplow Game after a work-release inmate, Mark Henderson, drove a tractor snowplow onto the field to clear a patch of turf for John Smith's winning field goal.

7. C -13°F

The 1967 Ice Bowl kicked off at an official -13°F; -48°F was the wind chill, not the air temperature, and the other options are unrelated figures.

8. A 15 yards

Dense fog cut on-field visibility to roughly 15 yards (accounts range from 10 to 20) during the 1988 Fog Bowl at Soldier Field.

9. A Pass for the point after touchdown

So many extra-point kicks sailed into the Griffith Stadium stands that officials asked the Bears to run or pass for the point after touchdown, to save the remaining balls.

10. D 65 seconds

Turner's field goal came with 65 seconds left; NBC cut away moments later, missing Oakland's two late touchdowns; the other times are from different miracle finishes.

Lesson 6: Strategy, Football Anatomy, College Traditions, and Tailgate Culture

1. B Clark Shaughnessy

Clark Shaughnessy modernized the T-Formation with the quarterback taking the snap directly from center and a man in motion, helping reshape quarterback play. The others are a run-and-shoot popularizer and defensive coordinators.

2. D Mouse Davis

Mouse Davis popularized the Run and Shoot at Portland State and in the USFL. Dungy is a Tampa 2 defensive coach, Arnsparger built the Dolphins' '53' defense, and Shaughnessy revived the T-Formation.

3. C Tampa 2

Tampa 2 uses a fast middle linebacker (such as Shelton Quarles) dropping deep between two Cover 2 safeties. Zone Blitz drops linemen into coverage instead, and 3-4 and Run and Shoot describe personnel/formations, not this coverage shape.

4. A Dick LeBeau

Dick LeBeau refined the Zone Blitz with the Bengals and made it famous with the Steelers. Dungy and Kiffin are credited with the Tampa 2, and Arnsparger built the Dolphins' '53' defense.

5. C Ronnie Brown

Ronnie Brown took direct snaps from the Dolphins' unbalanced Wildcat line and scored five touchdowns against New England in 2008. Charles, Peterson, and Gore are star running backs but were not part of that game.

6. B 1935

The award was created in 1935 and renamed for John W. Heisman in 1936. 1963 is when the Pro Football Hall of Fame was established, and 1994 is when the NFL adopted the two-point conversion.

7. A 45 lbs

The Heisman's cast bronze trophy weighs 45 pounds, per the trophy's official specifications.

8. D Archie Griffin

Ohio State's Archie Griffin won the Heisman in both 1974 and 1975, the award's only repeat winner. Woodson, Tebow, and Manziel are each single-time Heisman winners.

9. D 5 laterals

Cal completed five backward laterals through the Stanford band before Kevin Moen scored the winning touchdown.

10. A The 12th Man

Texas A&M's E. King Gill came down from the press box in 1922, founding the '12th Man' tradition. The other options are NFL and Clemson traditions, not this Texas A&M story.

Sources

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