

The Fall Football Cheat Sheet

Who to watch, what to say and when to cheer

Football is a pastime for some and a way of life for others, and, at this time of the year, it can be particularly difficult to ignore, even for the least sporty among us. If you'd like to contribute to the conversation around the big screen, try our cheat sheet for the vital stats on this all-American sport.

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THE BASICS

When a team has the ball, it's called a **possession**. During each possession, the team must move the ball in 10 yard increments from the ball's point of origin, known as the **line of scrimmage**, toward the opposing team's **end zone** (located at the end of the field, usually painted with bright logos). If the team fails to move the ball 10 or more yards during their initial four chances, called **downs**, their turn is over, and the other team takes possession of the ball. If the possessing team succeeds in moving the ball more than 10 yards within the first four downs, they get another four downs, and so on until they either score (with a **touchdown** or **field goal**) or are forced to give up possession.

SCORING

- Field Goal: Three points
- Touchdown: Six points
- Extra point: One point
- Two-point conversion: Two points (duh)
- Safety (tackling the player with the ball in his own end zone): Two points

NFL 101

The NFL (National Football League) is the Hollywood of football players. Few college players make it to professional status, but when they do, they play hard, make millions and create national scandals — Michael Vick, anyone? The NFL consists of two divisions, the AFC (American Football Conference) and the NFC (National Football Conference). There are 32 teams in the NFL, including the Atlanta Falcons, the New Orleans Saints and the Tennessee Titans. Each team competes throughout the season for the chance to become the conference champion. The two conference champions face off in the most widely watched football game of the year, the Super Bowl, usually played at the end of January. The winning team takes away the Vince Lombardi trophy, named for a former Green Bay Packers coach.

GOING FOR BONUS POINTS

It's often the penalties that make football such a competitive, and sometimes frustrating, sport. If you really want to impress on game day, learn a few of these important referee calls.

ILLEGAL SUBSTITUTION

There should never be more than eleven players on the field. Substitutions can only occur when the ball is dead.



FALSE START

Players can only move parallel to the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped. A player who moves otherwise before the ball is snapped commits a penalty.



CLIPPING

Even though football is a rough and tumble sport, players are not allowed to hit an opponent below the waist from behind. This one's a 15-yard penalty.



HOLDING

A player cannot keep his opponent from moving by grabbing him (instead of tackling or blocking). When this rule is broken by an offensive player, the penalty is 10 yards, and the teams repeat the down. When a defensive player is to blame, the penalty is five yards and an automatic first down for the offense.






OFFSIDE

Players cannot be in "the neutral zone," the area between the front and back of the ball, when the football is snapped.



NFL NAMES YOU MIGHT NEED TO KNOW AROUND HERE:

TEAM	CONFERENCE	COACH	QUARTERBACK
The Atlanta Falcons	NFC South	Bobby Petrino	Byron Leftwich/Joey Harrington (right) 
The New Orleans Saints	NFC South	Sean Payton	Drew Brees 
The Tennessee Titans	AFC South	Jeff Fisher	Vince Young 



It takes about 3,000 cows to supply enough leather for a year of NFL football.



SEC EAST

TEAM	MASCOT	COACH
University of Florida	Gators	Urban Meyer
University of Georgia	Bulldogs	Mark Richt
University of Kentucky	Wildcats	Rich Brooks
University of South Carolina	Gamecocks	Steve Spurrier
University of Tennessee	Volunteers	Phillip Fulmer
Vanderbilt University	Commodores	Bobby Johnson

SEC WEST

TEAM	MASCOT	COACH
Auburn University	Tigers	Tommy Tuberville
Louisiana State University (LSU)	Tigers	Les Miles
Mississippi State University	Bulldogs	Sylvester Croom
University of Alabama	Crimson Tide	Nick Saban
University of Arkansas	Razorbacks	Houston Nutt
University of Mississippi (Ole Miss)	Rebels	Ed Orgeron

CONFERENCE USA EAST

TEAM	MASCOT	COACH
East Carolina University	Pirates	Skip Holtz
Marshall University	Thundering Herd	Mark Snyder
University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB)	Blazers	Neil Callaway
University of Central Florida (UCF)	Knights	George O'Leary
University of Memphis	Tigers	Tommy West
University of Southern Mississippi (USM)	Golden Eagles	Jeff Bower

CONFERENCE USA WEST

TEAM	MASCOT	COACH
Rice University	Owls	David Bailiff
Southern Methodist University (SMU)	Mustangs	Phil Bennett
Tulane University	Green Wave	Bob Toledo
University of Houston	Cougars	Art Briles
University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP)	Miners	Mike Price
University of Tulsa	Golden Hurricane	Todd Graham

"THE MILLION DOLLAR BAND" IS THE NICKNAME OF ALABAMA'S 330-MEMBER MARCHING BAND. IT DATES BACK TO THEIR EARLY SUCCESS AT FUNDRAISING EFFORTS.



BRANDON COX: Tiger fans have a love/hate relationship with this Trussville native, who ranks second in Auburn history for passing efficiency.



JOHN PARKER WILSON: The Hoover High School graduate passed for 363 yards, a career high, in the Tide's 2007 victory over Tennessee.



SAM HUNT: The Blazer QB is known for getting out of the pocket and running the ball.