

CAMP WALTER

AMERICAN
FOOTBALL

Walter Camp American Football

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American Football:

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PREFACE

The progress of the sport of football in this country, and a corresponding growth of inquiry as to the methods adopted by experienced teams, have prompted the publication of this book. Should any of the suggestions herein contained conduce to the further popularity of the game, the object of the writer will be attained.

ENGLISH AND AMERICAN RUGBY

AMERICAN FOOTBALL

Rugby football – for it is from the Rugby Union Rules that our American Intercollegiate game was derived – dates its present era of popularity from the formation in England, in 1871, of a union of some score of clubs. Nearly ten years before this there had been an attempt made to unite the various diverging football factions under a common set of laws; but this proved a failure, and the styles of play became farther and farther apart. Of the Association game one can say but little as regards its American following. It is quite extensively played in this country, but more by those who have themselves played it in Great Britain than by native-born Americans. Its popularity is extending, and at some day it will very likely become as well understood in this country as the derived Rugby is to-day. Its essential characteristic is, that it is played with the feet, in distinction from the Rugby, in which the ball may be carried in the hands.

To revert to the Rugby Union. Years before the formation of this association the game was played by sides almost unlimited in numbers. One of the favorite school matches was "Sixth form

against all the rest of the school." Twenty on a side, however, became the ruling number; but this was, after a time, replaced by fifteens, as the days of twenties proved only shoving matches. With the reduction in numbers came increased running and an added interest. This change to fifteens was made in 1877, at the request of Scotland. At once there followed a more open style of play, and before long short passing became common. In 1882 the Oxford team instituted the long low pass to the open, and by the use of it remained undefeated for three seasons.

After the decrease to fifteen men the number of three-quarter-backs, who really represent our American half-backs, was increased from one to two, and two full-backs were played. A little later British captains put another full-back up into the three-quarter line, playing with only one full-back.

The Englishmen also play two men whom they call half-backs, but whose duties are like those of our quarter-back, for they seize the ball when it comes out of the scrimmage and pass it to a three-quarter for a run.

Nine men is the usual number for an English rush line, although a captain will sometimes take his ninth rusher back as a fourth three-quarter-back. There is much discussion as to when this should be done. The captain selects his men much as we do in America, and he is generally himself a player of some position behind the line, centre three-quarter being preferred. The opening play in an English Rugby game is, as a rule, a high kick well followed up. If one will bear in mind that the half-

backs are, like our quarter, the ones to seize the ball when it emerges from a scrimmage and pass it to the three-quarters, he will gain some idea of the character of the English method. He should understand, however, that the English half-back is obliged to look out sharply for the ball, because it comes out by chance and at random, and not directly as in our game, where the quarter can usually expect to receive the ball without trouble from the snap-back.

The forwards in an English match endeavor, when a scrimmage occurs, by kicking and pushing to drive the ball in the direction of their opponents' goal line, and they become extremely expert in the use of their feet. There are two umpires, whose duty it is to make claims (which they do by raising their flags), and a referee, who allows or disallows these claims. The penalty for fouls, which was at first only a down, is now in many cases a free kick.

The American game, it must be remembered, came from the Rugby Union in 1875, and not from the Rugby Union of today, although the changes in the English game have been by no manner of means commensurate with those made on this side the water. Being bound by no traditions, and having seen no play, the American took the English rules for a starting-point, and almost immediately proceeded to add and subtract, according to what seemed his pressing needs. And they were many. A favored few, whose intercourse with Canadian players had given them some of the English ideas, were able to explain the knotty points

to a small degree, but not enough to really assist the mass of uninitiated players to an understanding. Misinterpretations were so numerous as to render satisfactory rulings almost out of the question and explanatory legislation imperative. In the autumn of 1876 the first game under Rugby rules between American colleges was played at New Haven, and before another was attempted a convention had tried its hand at correcting the weak points, as they appeared to the minds of the legislators, in the Rugby Union Rules.

The feature of the American game in distinction from the English is, just as it was within a year from the time of the adoption of the sport, the *outlet of the scrimmage*.

In this lies the backbone to which the entire body of American football is attached. The English half-backs stand outside the scrimmage, and when the ball pops out it is their duty to seize it and pass it out to a three-quarter, who runs with it. The American quarter-back stands behind the scrimmage and gives a signal, immediately after which he knows the ball will come directly into his hands to be passed for a run or a kick. What is, therefore, in the English game a matter of considerable chance is "cut-and-dried" in the American game; and the element of chance being eliminated, opportunity is given for the display in the latter game of far more skill in the development of brilliant plays and carefully planned man[oe]uvres.

The Americans started with the English scrimmage, kicked at the ball, and pushed and scrambled for a season, until it was

discovered that a very clever manifestation of the play was to let the opponents do the kicking – in fact, to leave an opening at the proper moment through which the ball would come, and a man a few feet behind this opening could always get the ball and pass it while the men who kicked it were still entangled in the scrimmage. After a little of this, no one was anxious to kick the ball through, and the rushers began to roll the ball sidewise along between the lines. Then almost immediately it was discovered that a man could snap the ball backwards with his toe, and the American outlet was installed.

At first the play was crude in the extreme, but even in its earliest stages it proved distinctly more satisfactory to both player and spectator than the kicking and shoving which marked the English method.

The same man did not always snap the ball back as he does now, but any one of the rushers would do it upon occasion. The men did not preserve their relative positions in the line, and any one of the men behind the line would act as a quarter-back. Such a condition of affairs could not, however, last long where intercollegiate rivalry proved such an incentive to the perfection of play, and the positions of centre-rush or snap-back and quarter-back became the most distinctive of any upon the field. The centre-rush at that time was selected more for his agility, strange to say, than for his weight and strength; but in case he was a light man he was always flanked by two heavy guards. One season's play convinced all captains that the centre section

of the forward line must be heavy, and if any light-weights were to be used among the rushers they should be near the wings.

Quarter-back has, from the very outset, been a position in which a small man can be used to great advantage. The half-backs and backs have usually been men of speed coupled with skill as kickers.

The number originally adopted for matches in this country was eleven on a side. From some silly notion that it would increase the skill displayed, this number was changed to fifteen, although the Englishmen were moving in the other direction by reducing their numbers from twenties to fifteens. A year or two of fifteen on a side drove the American players back to elevens, and there the number has rested.

In the early days of the sport, while the players individually were courageous, the team play was cowardly; that is, the tacticians were so taken up with a study of defence – how to protect the goal – that the attack was weak. The direct result of this was to place too few men in the forward line and too many behind it. If to-day we were to revert to fifteen on a side, there is little doubt that we should throw eleven of them up into the rush line, and upon occasion even twelve. We now realize that the best defence does not consist in planning how to stop a man after he has obtained a fair start towards the goal, but in throwing all available force up against him before he can get free of the forward line. The only way to effectively defeat this aggressive defence is by means of skilled kicking. It is possible with really

good kickers to throw a team playing in this fashion into disorder by well-placed and long punting, followed up most sharply; but it requires nerve and an unfailing accuracy of aim and judgment.

It is only a few years ago that it required considerable argument to convince a captain that he could with safety send one of his halves up into the forward line when his opponents had the ball; but it will take better kicking than is exhibited in most of the championship matches to frighten that half-back out of the line now. Even the quarter was wont upon occasion to drop back among the halves and assist them rather than the rushers.

All the tendency for the last two years has been towards diminishing the number of men held in reserve, as it were, behind the line, and increasing by this means the crushing force by which the forwards might check either runner or kicker before his play could be executed.

Should the English ever adopt an outlet for their scrimmage, making the play as direct as is ours, their men would gravitate to the forward line as rapidly as have our players.

Next to the difference in scrimmage outlet between our game and that of the British stands a much more recent development, which we call interference. This is the assistance given to a runner by a companion or companions who go before him and break a path for him or shoulder off would-be tacklers. This, to the Englishman, would be the most detestable kind of off-side play, and not tolerated for an instant upon any field in the United Kingdom.

Even into this the Americans did not plunge suddenly, but rather little by little they stepped in, until it was necessary to do one of two things – either legalize what was being tacitly consented to, or penalize it heavily. The result was that it was legalized. With this concession, though, there went a certain condition which gained a measure of confidence for the new ruling.

To understand just how this state of affairs above mentioned came about one should know that, in the attempt to block opponents when the quarter-back was receiving and passing the ball, the forwards fell into the habit of extending their arms horizontally from the shoulder, as by this method each man could cover more space. For a number of years this went on without detriment to the sport in any way, but after a time there was more or less complaint of holding in the line, and it was ruled that a man must not change his position after the ball was snapped, nor bend his arms about an opponent at such a time. Unfortunately the referee (for at this stage of the game there was no umpire) could not watch the ball and the players with sufficient care to enforce this ruling, and the temper of the players suffered accordingly. It is always the case when a rule is not enforced unflinchingly, no matter from what cause, that both sides suffer, and the tendency always is towards devising additional infringements. The additional infringement in this instance was even worse than could have been foreseen; for, not content with simply blocking or even holding an opponent until

the quarter should have passed the ball in safety, the players in the forward line saw an opportunity for going a step farther, and actually began the practice of seizing an opponent long after the ball had been played, and dragging him out of the way of the running half-back. In the thick of the rush line this was frequently possible without risk of discovery by the referee; and, emboldened by successes of this kind, men would reach out even in the open, and drag back a struggling tackler just as he was about to lay his hands upon the runner. It was this state of affairs which brought up the question, "How much should a comrade be allowed to aid the runner?"

American football legislators answered this question satisfactorily, after long discussion, by determining that the runner might be assisted to any extent, provided the assistant did not use his hands or arms in performing this office. The first result of this was to lower the arms of the rushers when lined up, and, in spite of some forebodings, this proved really a benefit to the game. The second result has been to perfect a system of flanking a runner by companions who form almost an impassable barrier at times to the would-be tacklers.

At the same time with mention of the solution of this problem, one should also call attention to a menace which threatened American football far more seriously than did this; and that, too, at a time when the sport was by no means so strong in years or popularity as when this later difficulty arose. I refer to the "block game." This method of play, which consisted in a succession of

"downs" without advance and without allowing the opponents any chance of securing possession of the ball, proved a means by which a weak team could avoid defeat. The whole object of the match was thus frustrated, the game resulting in no score.

To meet this difficulty a rule was introduced making it incumbent upon a side to advance the ball five yards or retreat with it ten in three "downs." If this advance or retreat were not accomplished, the ball went at once into the possession of the opponents. Never did a rule in any sport work so immediate and satisfactory a reform as did this five-yard rule.

Within the last few years there has been no important change in the conduct of the American game, nor in the rules. Outside of the above mentioned points of difference between it and the English game, there is only that of the methods of enforcing rules and determining differences. The English have a referee and two umpires, although the umpires are sometimes replaced by touch-judges. The umpires act, as did the judges in our game of ten years ago, as advocates for their respective sides, and it is this advocacy which is causing them to fall into disfavor there exactly as they did here. Touch-judges merely watch the lines of the field, and decide when and where the ball goes into touch. In cases where they are employed, the referee renders all decisions upon claim of the captains. In our method there is a division of labor, but along different lines. Our two officials, the umpire and referee, have their separate provinces, the former ruling upon the conduct of players as to off-side and other offences, while the

latter determines questions of fact as to when the ball is held or goes into touch, also whether a goal is kicked or not. As the rule has it, the umpire is judge for the players, and the referee for the ball.

END RUSHER

The end rusher must get into condition early. Unless he does, he cannot handle the work that must fall to his share, and the effect of a poor performance by the end is to produce disorder at once in the proportion of work as well as the quality of the work of the tackles and half-backs. This is not well understood by captains and coaches, but it is easy to see if one follows the play. A tired end rusher, even one who has experience and a good idea of his place, will lope down the field under a kick, and by his lack of speed will allow a return; and, against a running game, while he will, it is true, force his man in, he will do it so slowly that the runner is enabled to pass the tackle. The first will surely result in his own halves shortening their kicks, and the second in drawing his own tackle too widely from the guard. Both these results seriously affect the value of the practice for halves and tackles; consequently, the end must be put in condition early. The finer points of his position can be worked up gradually, but his endurance must be good at the outset, in order that the others may become accustomed to rely upon him for regular work. But it sometimes happens that the captain or coach has no chance to make sure of this. His candidates may be raw, and only appear upon the first day of fall practice. In that case there is a method which he can adopt to advantage, and which answers the purpose. It is to play his candidates for that position one after

the other in rotation, insisting upon hard playing even if it be for only five minutes at a time. In this way not only will the tackle receive the proper support, but the ends themselves will improve far more rapidly than under the usual method. Every player upon a team has to labor under two distinctly different sets of circumstances: one set arising from the possession of the ball by his opponents, and the other from the possession of the ball by his own side. Many an error in instruction or coaching arises from terming the tactics adopted under these two conditions defensive and offensive. It is no uncommon thing to see an end rusher, who has been told that such and such is his defensive play, so affected by the word *defensive*, as applied to his action, as to fail entirely to perform any aggressive work when his opponents have the ball. And a similarly undesirable state of affairs is brought about by the term *offensive* when his own side have the ball. In this latter case, he seems inspired to become aggressive in his conduct towards his opponent from the moment the men are lined up, and this very often leads him to make any interference of his so premature as to render it useless towards favoring his runner. One of the first things, therefore, for a coach to tell an end rusher is that the terms offensive and defensive, as applied to team work, have nothing to do with the aggressiveness of any individual. Then, as a matter of still better policy, let him avoid using these terms in individual coaching.

When the opponents have the ball, the end rusher must, in the case of a kick, do his utmost to prevent his *vis-à-vis* from

getting down the field early under the ball. That is the cardinal point, and it is not necessary for him to do much thinking regarding anything else when he is facing a kicking game. When his opponents are about to make a run, the situation is much more involved. He must then consider himself as the sole guardian of that space of ground extending from his tackle to the edge of the field, and he must begin at the touch line and work in. That is, he must remember that, while on one side of him there is the tackle, who will do his utmost to help him out, there is on the other side – that is, towards touch – no one to assist him, and a run around the end means a free run for many yards. "Force the man in" is always a good motto for an end, and one he will do well to follow conscientiously. To force the man in does not mean, however, to stand with one foot on the touch line, and then reach in as far as possible and watch the man go by, as nine out of every ten ends have been doing for two years. It means, go at the runner with the determination of getting him any way, but taking him always from the outside. An end cannot tackle as occasionally does a half-back or back, slowly and even waiting for his man, then meeting him low and strong. An end always has to face interference, and good interference will bowl over a waiting end with ease. An end must go up as far and fast as he dares to meet the runner, and when his moment comes – which must be a selected moment – he must shoot in at his man, reaching him, if possible, with his shoulder, and at the same time extending his arms as far around him as possible. Many times this

reaching enables an end to grasp his man even though a clever interfeerer break the force of his tackle. And when his fingers touch the runner, he must grip with the tenacity of the bull-dog, and never let go.

It seems almost unnecessary to say that a high tackler has no chance whatever as an end rusher. He may play guard or centre, but before a man ever essays the end he must have passed through all the rudimentary schooling in tackling, and be such an adept that to pass him without the assistance of the most clever interference is an impossibility.

An end should be a good follower; that is, if the runner make in towards the tackle, the end should run him down from behind when interference cuts off the tackle. This is one of the best points for cultivation, because it effectually prevents any dodging by the runner. If he fail to take his opening cleanly, a following end is sure of him. This is not a safe point, however, to teach until the player has fairly mastered the ordinary end-work; for the tendency is to leave his own position too soon, giving the runner an opportunity to turn out behind him, and thus elude the tackle without difficulty.

A few years ago there was quite a fashion for the man putting the ball in from touch to run with it along the edge of the field. For some unknown reason this play seems to have been abandoned, but it is likely at any time to be revived, and the end rusher should therefore be posted upon the *modus operandi* of it, as well as the best method of preventing its success. The most

popular execution of this man[oe]uvre was the simplest; that is, the man merely touched the ball to the ground and plunged ahead as far as he could until brought to earth or thrown out into touch. This was accompanied by more or less helpful interferences upon the part of his own end and tackle. There were more intricate methods, however; and surely, with the amount of interference allowed in these days, it is odd that the side line has not been more fancied by those who have generalised the great games. There was one team a few years ago whose captain used to deliberately place the ball just inside the line on the ground, as though only thoughtlessly leaving it there, and then spring in, crowding the end rusher three or four feet from the touch line, while a running half, who was well started, came tearing up the field, seized the ball, and usually made a long run before he was stopped by the astonished halves. Many also were the combination passes in which the ball was handed to the end rusher, who, turning suddenly with his back to the foes, would pass to his quarter or running half. Of these close double passes at the edge of the field the most effective were those wherein the runner darted by just inside the touch line, and the weakest the ones wherein the attempt was made to advance out into the field. For this reason there ought to be no particular necessity for coaching any but the end rusher and the tackle upon means to prevent advances of this nature. To the players in the centre of the line there is no apparent difference whether the ball be played from touch in any of these ways above mentioned, or through the more customary

channel of the quarter-back. To the end and tackle, however, the difference is marked, because the runner comes so much sooner and the play is so greatly condensed and focussed, as it were, directly upon them.

The instructions to the end are to handle the ball as much as possible while the opponent is endeavoring to get it in, and thus make the work of that individual as difficult as possible; and, secondly, to plant one foot close to the touch line and the other as far out into the field as is consistent with stability, and to maintain that position until the play is over. He must neither try to go forward nor around, but, braced well forward, hold his ground. If he does this, no runner can pass within three feet of the touch line, and outside of that the tackle can take care of him. This player, like the end, should, when the ball is played from a fair, be very loath to plunge forward until the play is located, because in the present stage of development of the game one can be quite sure that the opponents will not play the ball from touch unless they have some definite and usually deceptive line of action. Without such it is by far the better policy to walk out the fifteen paces and have it down. The quarter-back also has work to do upon side-line plays, in assisting at the edge as much as possible. But to return to the end. When his own side have possession of the ball, his play, like that of any other man, must be governed by the character of the intended move, and the knowledge of what this move will be is conveyed to him by the signal. The nearer the play is to his end, the greater is the

assistance he can render. There is little need of coaching him to do his work when the run is along his line, nor, in fact, when it is upon his side of the centre. The knowledge of the proximity of the runner stirs him up sufficiently, if he have any football blood in him. The point towards which coaching should be directed and where it is needed is in starting instantly to render assistance when the play is upon the other side of the line. There is no limit to the amount of work an end may perform in this direction. A good end can toss his man back so that he cannot interfere with the play, and then cross over so quickly as to perform effective interference even upon end runs. In "bucking the centre" he can come from behind with valuable weight and pressure. A coach should remember, though, that it will not do to start an end into doing too much unless he is able to stand the work, for an end had better do the work well upon his own side than be only half way useful upon both ends. A tired-out end makes the opponents doubly strong.

THE TACKLE

Those teams upon which the work of end and tackle has been best developed have, for the last few years, been markedly superior in the opposition offered to plays of their opponents. This fact in itself is an excellent guide to the style of play one ought to expect from these two positions. The four men occupying them are the ones to meet nine tenths of the aggressive work of the opponents. The position of end has already been dwelt upon at length. That of tackle, a position much later to reach the full stage of development than the end, has nevertheless now attained almost an equal prominence. The tackle is an assistant to both end and guard, while he has also duties of his own demanding constant attention.

When the opponents have the ball and are about to kick, the tackle is one of the most active components of the line. He may not be moving until the ball is snapped, but upon the instant that it is played he is at work. He may himself go through to prevent the pass or kick, or still oftener he may make a chance for a line half-back to do this. By a line half-back is meant that one who, upon his opponents' plays, comes up into the line and performs the duties of a rusher. This method has become so common of late that it is well understood. The play of this line half-back must dovetail into the work of the tackle so well as to make their system one of thoroughly mutual understanding. For this

reason they should do plenty of talking and planning together off the field, and carry their plans into execution in daily practice until they become in company a veritable terror to opponents, particularly to kicking halves.

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