

Let's Talk About...

Football



Football has been the most popular sport in America for over 30 years. One-third of sports fans say football is their favorite sport—no other sport comes close! It's no surprise that the Super Bowl draws over 100 million viewers annually.

**What sports do you enjoy
watching?**

Football?

Basketball?

Baseball?

Golf?

Tennis?

Others?



Football is so popular that some kids start playing at the age of five. Do you feel this is too young?

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*Next Reader,
Please*

American football can be traced all the way back to 1869. The game was played very differently at that time. Early football was a mix of rugby and soccer. There were 50 players on the field at a time, and they used a round ball.

Walter Camp is known as the “Father of American Football.” He helped bring about major changes in the 1880’s. He established the use of the line of scrimmage, which is the starting point for each play. He also created the idea of the seven-player offensive line.



This is a team from the early years of football. Do they seem as tough as modern football players?

Football was violent in its early years. In 1905, there were 19 deaths reported from the sport! This caused President Theodore Roosevelt to get involved. It is said he was going to shut down the game unless changes were made. After this, rules were put in place to cut down on injuries.

The football helmet was invented in 1896. It was dubbed a “head harness.” It provided only minimal protection. Over time, upgrades were made. In 1932, an inventor was so proud of his new helmet that he let people kick him in the head to show it off!



This helmet is from the 1930's. Does it look like it offers enough protection?

At first, football was just a hobby. In 1892, “Pudge” Heffelfinger became the first man to be paid to play. He earned 500 dollars. In 1926, Red Grange was paid 100,000 dollars to play in 19 games. This was a huge sum of money at the time. Today, players can make millions of dollars.

Do you think playing a sport would be a good career?

Why or why not?

Philadelphia's Franklin Field is the oldest football stadium still standing. It opened in 1895. It only cost 100,000 dollars to build. This would be equal to almost three million dollars today. This is cheap compared to modern stadiums, which can cost over a billion dollars!



Photo by Pennsylvania University Archives / CC BY

**This is Franklin Field in
1922. Were buildings made
better years ago?**

**Many people will pay over
300 dollars for one ticket
to a football game.**

**Would you be willing to
pay this much to see your
favorite team?**

You have probably heard of the National Football League (NFL). It is the largest pro football league. The league was formed in 1920. At first, it was called the American Professional Football Association. It had only 14 teams. Many teams were in smaller cities like Canton, Ohio.

There have been many great football players over the years. "Bullet Bill" Dudley was one of the best players in the 1940's. Like many players at that time, he played various positions, including running back, defensive back, and kicker.

Jim Brown was one of the best football players of all time. He was a running back for the Cleveland Browns from 1957 to 1965. He rushed an average of 5.2 yards per carry. Besides being a talented football player, he was also very skilled at track, lacrosse, and basketball.

**After retiring from football,
Jim Brown had a
successful acting career.
Would you rather be a pro
athlete or an actor?
Why?**



U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Chad J. McNeeley / CC BY

Running backs are often hard to tackle. Would you even *try* to tackle a fast-moving running back?

The NFL season begins in August and ends in January. In the later part of the season, weather can be brutal. A famous game, now called the “Ice Bowl,” took place in Green Bay in 1967. When the Packers took the field to play the Cowboys, it was 15 degrees below zero!



This snowy game took place in Seattle. Would you go to a football game on a snowy day?

The NFL is a multi-billion-dollar organization. It has used some of its financial power for good. In 1930, a game was held between the New York Giants and all star players from Notre Dame College. It raised over 100,000 dollars to help people during the Great Depression.

The NFL has donated millions of dollars to many other causes, including one million dollars to help victims of the San Francisco earthquake. They also donated 250,000 dollars to the USO (United Service Organizations). Some players also have their own charities.

Football has changed a lot over the years. It began as a hobby similar to rugby. Today, athletes dream of making big money in the NFL. Millions of fans spend Sundays cheering on their favorite teams. It can be hard to tell who takes the game more seriously: the players or the fans!

**This completes our story
and discussion.**

***Would you like to do this
again sometime?***



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