

Game time, 4 quarters, and substitutions

Fan level

Rule 3 – Periods, Time Factors and Substitutions

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- The team captains meet in the middle of the field.
- The visiting team captain calls 'heads' or 'tails'
- The Referee (or VIP) flips the coin.
- The winner of the toss chooses one of the following:
 - To receive the ball at the first kickoff (or to kick-off)
 - An end of the field to defend
 - Defer their choice to the second half
- Usually the winner chooses to receive the ball at the first kick-off, or defer to the second half. Choosing 'defer' should result in possession of the ball at the start of the second half.
- The loser of the toss chooses the remaining option.



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'Regular' periods

- The game is divided in 4 quarters (or periods).
 - NFL and NCAA: 15 minutes each
 - IFAF: 12 minutes each
- The 1st and 3rd periods start with a kickoff.
- The 2nd and 4th periods start at the other half of the field.
 - So, if the ball is dead at team A's 30 yardline with team A in possession, the next snap will be from team B's 30 yardline. Team A will retain possession.
- Between the 2nd and 3rd quarter it is 'halftime'.
 - Normally a 20 minute break.

Extra periods (overtime) (1/2)

- If the game is tied after 4 periods, overtime usually applies.
- NCAA/IFAF overtime rules are very different than NFL's overtime rules. e.g. NFL has a 'golden score' rule, NCAA/IFAF do not.
- Overtime starts with a cointoss. It is the same as the toss in slide 3, except the winner of the toss may not defer.
- Each extra period consists of 2 possession series. Normally, each team gets possession of the ball on offense during a period.
- The ball is placed at the 25 yardline, first down and 10 yards to go.

Extra periods (overtime) (2/2)

- A possession series ends when you would expect:
 - The offense scores
 - The offense does not gain sufficient yardage ('turnover on downs')
 - The offense loses possession of the ball during the down (e.g. interception)
- Then, the other team gets the ball at the same 25 yardline.
- If the score is still tied at the end of the first extra period (so after both possession series), the second extra period starts.
- This 'process' continues until we have a winner 😊

- The game clock counts down the time remaining in the quarter (period)
- The clock is stopped frequently.
- On a normal ‘scrimmage down’, the clock may be started on
 - The referee’s ready for play signal
 - The snap
- Rules specify when it should be started. For example:
 - After an incomplete pass, the game clock stops. It should next start on the snap
 - During an injury timeout the game clock stops. It should should next start on the ‘ready for play’.
- During the last years, the rule committees have tried to reduce game time. However, a football game still takes around 2,5 to 3 hours.



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- Each team has a maximum of 3 team timeouts in each half.
- They are frequently taken to:
 - Stop the game clock when they are trying to score near the end of a half
 - Have a 1 minute team meeting to discuss the next play(s).
- A team timeout may be requested by:
 - Each player on the field
 - The head coach
- During overtime, each team has 1 timeout in an extra period.
- Officials may take an ‘officials timeout’ as well. For example, when a player is injured, officials call an injury timeout.
 - The injured player has to stay out of the game for one play

- A play clock limits the time the offense has to bring the ball in play.
 - By snapping or kicking the ball.
- The play clock may be visible on the field, or timed by the officials.
- The clock counts down from 40 seconds when the ball is dead and ‘nothing special’ happens, for example when
 - The ball carrier is tackled in the field of play
 - The passer throws an incomplete pass
- The clock counts down from 25 seconds, for example when
 - There is a penalty on the previous play
 - There was a score
 - A team was granted a timeout
- If the play clock expires before the ball is kicked or snapped, the offense commits a Delay of Game foul.

- There is no limit to the number of substitutions
- Players may be substituted only when the ball is dead
- When the offense sends in (late) substitutes, the defense is allowed to substitute as well. The defense may 'match up'.
- Substitute rules are strict for the offense.
 - Breaking the offensive huddle with more than 11 players is a foul.

Remember: Game time, 4 quarters, and substitutions

- The game is divided in 4 quarters (or periods).
 - NFL and NCAA: 15 minutes each
 - IFAF: 12 minutes each
- The game clock is stopped and started regularly.
- The 25/40 second play clock maximises the time the offense has to bring the ball in play
- There is no limit to the number of substitutions during the game