



Tips and Techniques for Football Players: Play like a Pro!

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FOOTBALL

Football is the most popular sport in the United States. From youth organizations all the way up to the professional leagues, football provides exercise and entertainment for millions of people.

With twenty-two positions on just the offensive and defensive sides of the ball, and several more specialized positions on special teams, expanding on tips for each and every position would fill an encyclopedia! In this book, you'll find some pointers for warm-ups and drills, as well as tips for some of the individual positions, and nutrition that will be beneficial for all football players.

The information listed here will be the best ones to do to improve an individual's game. Because most of what can be done on a football field involves more than one person, many of these examples can be done alone or with a few people's help.

WARM-UPS AND DRILLS

Practice is a vital part of any sport. Not only does the repetition of drills help you become a better football player, but warming up your body is beneficial to prevent injuries.

WARM-UPS

It's best to start slow and work on basic movements to limber up your body to prepare it for the rigors of football. Starting with a few basic stretches (toe touches, straddle toe touches, twists, windmills) are necessary for getting your joints lubricated. Never bounce when doing stretching, as this may not stretch muscles properly and can actually cause muscle tears.

Jumping jacks are a great way to get your heart rate up. It's not uncommon to see a football team start out with jumping jacks when they're doing their pre-game warm-up routine. This also helps get the muscles in your legs warmed up. Crunches and push-ups are an excellent way to get the muscles in your arms and abdomen warmed up.

It's also not a bad idea for all players – not just quarterbacks – to toss around the football to warm up. Concentrating on throwing a spiral pass can help get a player's mind into the game. The motion of throwing is good to limber up the shoulder, something important to all positions on the gridiron. Catching the ball also helps with hand-eye coordination. Although not every position needs good hand-eye coordination per se, drill that help with this area also tend to help with peripheral vision and good vision.

And off the field, one of the best ways to stay in shape is to take dance classes. Any modern dancing is good to keep your body in shape. Gymnastics is good for agility. And famously, ballet is an excellent cross-training activity for football players. Lynn Swann, the Hall of Fame wide receiver for the Pittsburgh Steelers during the team's 1970s dynasty, had no qualms about letting the world know he took ballet to help improve his balance and coordination. He even appeared during this time on the famous children's television show "Mr. Roger's Neighborhood" on Public Television to discuss this dichotomy.

DRILLS

As mentioned before, because there are so many different, highly individualized positions on a football team, it would be impossible to give a full list of drills for everyone. So the list below is a general list, touching base on as many positions as possible.

Because the most beneficial football practicing is done with more than one person (someone has to be around to catch the ball or create resistance on a blocking drill), many of these drills are more appropriate for a team practice. But if you want to better yourself on an individual basis, some of these drills are doable if you gather a few training buddies to work on these outside of a formal practice.

QUARTERBACKS AND RECEIVER DRILLS

- **Opposite Foot Drill**
This drill helps with quarterback accuracy while scrambling, and is a good warm-up drill. Place the same foot forward as your throwing hand in a heel-to-toe motion, pointing your toes in the direction of your target. If you rotate your hips as you throw, your weight should transfer over the ball of your forward foot.
- **Parallel Foot Drill**
This is not a power drill, but a technique and accuracy drill. Pair up with a buddy about twelve yards apart, but as you warm up, increase to up to twenty yards. Again, the idea is to throw without moving either leg. To keep your balance, make sure you stand with your feet at shoulder width and knees slightly bent. This is a good drill to help getting the shoulder and hips moving correctly through the throw.
- **Follow Through Drill**
Set up as if you were doing the Opposite Foot Drill. This time, go through the same slow motion with the correct foot. Again, the idea is not speed on the throw, but to concentrate on making a good follow through. The repetition in doing this drill helps condition the follow through to muscle memory, to where it should become second nature to finish with a good follow through every time you throw.
- **Two Knees Drill**
This is a good concentration drill for the quarterback and an excellent drill for the

receiver to practice giving a target to the quarterback. Both players should pair up about ten yards apart, but this time, the players should kneel on both knees. Like the Parallel Foot Drill, there should be no “step” into the throw. Again, this is not about power. The receiver should give different (but realistic) targets for the quarterback.

RUNNING BACKS DRILLS

- **Running the Sideline Drill**

Have teammates or coaches line up with practice shields about two or three yards from the sideline in the playing field. Have them situated about every five yards or so. Have a running back run past this gauntlet with ball in hand. The other players will attempt to hit the running back with a high or low delivery. On high hits, the running back should concentrate on using high arm strength, putting weight on the sideline foot, and pushing to the inside to give the blow back to the defender. On low hits, the running back should concentrate on keeping the toes pointed upfield, planting with the sideline foot and using an explosive push-off, and giving with the hips to go with the hit. The running back should be concentrating on staying in bounds (he will be knocked out but he shouldn't intentionally run out of bounds) and protecting the ball.

- **Ball Protection Drill**

This drill is designed to help a running back protect the ball when running through the defense. Have teammates line up in two lines facing each other about a yard apart. Practice receiving a hand-off from the quarterback to start the drill. Then run through the gauntlet of players as they try to strip the ball from the running back, and finish by sprinting for ten yards after finishing through the lines. This drill helps promote body balance, running through tackles, and protecting the ball.

- **Rope Drills**

The ropes are a vital piece of equipment to a football team. If you do not have access to the ropes, it's just as easy to set up a basic outline of how the ropes are drawn out. Although you won't have the ropes set up in the block formation for the vertical, you can still run these drills by drawing the basic outlines in chalk if you're on a hard top and drawing with a stick if you're on flat ground. Here are a few drills you can do in this set-up:

1. **Checker Board**

Jump from one square to another with legs together, hitting the squares that are at 45 degree angles, like you would on a checker board.

2. **Bunny Hop**

Instead of zig-zagging through the course, just jump straight through down one lane. This is a good warm-up exercise.

3. **High Stepping**

Run through the ropes with your legs lifted high, with the left leg staying

on the left side and the right leg staying on the right side. The legs should move in a churning motion.

4. **Cross-over**

This is the same drill as the high-stepping drill, except with this one, the right leg goes to the left side and the left leg goes to the right side.

KICKING

- **The Horseshoe Drill**

This is a drill for place kickers. Starting one hash mark on the 15-yard line, attempt a field goal. Then try from the 20-yard line, the 25-yard line, and the 30-yard line. Then try two more field goals in between the hash marks on the 30-yard line. Then make an attempt on the opposite hash mark on the 30-yard line, then go toward the goal line, kicking field goals every five yards. This is a great drill to practice all angles.

- **Drop Consistency**

This is a drill for punters. Stand straddling a yard line or a side line. Take your normal stride as you would to prepare to punt, but don't kick. Just drop the ball. A good drop will have the nose of the football slightly down and in. On a good drop, the ball will bounce backwards and slightly outside the line.

TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

Here are some tips to make you a better football player.

QUARTERBACK

- **Have a positive attitude**

Although you may be the general on the field, that doesn't mean you run the whole team or the organization. Your coach is your boss when you play football, and therefore, he must be shown respect. Even if you disagree with his tactics or methods, airing dirty laundry in front of everyone can cause a team to fall apart. Other players on the team will look to you not only for guidance on the field, but also they will look to you on how to carry themselves.

- **Develop the whole body**

Quarterbacks are often thought of as their arm, and little else. Developing a strong arm is good, but top-notch quarterbacks develop a strong body to put up with the rigors of football. Having strong abs, gluts, and oblique muscles will help put power into a quarterback's throws. A medicine ball provides a good all-around workout for a quarterback.

- **Take it slow in warm-ups**
It's not just your muscles in your arm that need to be ready to go after warm-ups. You may feel like your arm is ready to go, but your shoulder and elbow joints may not have worked themselves out. Do some shoulder rotations to get the lubricants working in your shoulder, and it will also help with your range of motion.
- **Keep your elbow up**
Many quarterbacks try to get extra "oomph" on their passes by flinging the ball side-armed. Despite some NFL quarterbacks resorting to this tactic when they're being pursued in the backfield, it is not an accurate way to throw, and it puts a terrible strain on the elbow joint.
- **Accuracy, accuracy, accuracy**
Long bombs down the field may look flashy, but the most important thing a quarterback should concentrate on is their accuracy. Even in practice, it's important to pick a set target and throw at it, even if it's a drill where you have to lead the receiver. Imagine the spot where the receiver is supposed to end up at and concentrate on hitting that spot.

RUNNING BACKS

- **Never stop moving your feet**
Keep pushing and kicking with your feet. It's a good way to keep your balance. Sometimes it will make a defender second-guess whether they want to tackle you below the waist or not.
- **Keep your head down**
The position your body is in when your head is down helps give you a better stance, and makes it harder for a defender to tackle you. It's also a more aerodynamic way to run.
- **Learn to block well**
Although the running back is already a glory position, you will find even more praise if you learn to block and become successful at it. Some of the best highlights of long bombs for touchdowns will be made even more impressive if a running back takes down a charging linebacker.

LONG SNAPPERS

These tips come from the Chicago Bears long snapper, Patrick Mannelly:

- **Straightness**
Make sure your feet are parallel to the line of scrimmage to keep the ball on a straight path. Both feet should slide straight back during a long snap from the

momentum of your arms. Also, your hands should be even on the ball to keep it straight.

- **Preventing a high snap**

A high snap could mean the ball is being released too far into the backswing. A good way to correct this is to make your forearms hit lower on your thighs to help drop your release point. Raising your butt can also lead to a high snap. Keep your back flat and parallel to the ground.

- **Preventing a low snap**

One reason for a low snap can be letting go of the ball too soon. Hanging on to it for a split second longer during the follow through can help. Also, just as with the high snap, having your forearms hit higher on your thighs during the follow through can help.

WIDE RECEIVERS

- Keep your eyes on the ball. One of the biggest mistakes a receiver can make is turning his head to run upfield before he has made the catch. It's important to look the ball all the way into your hands before making a move. It's pointless to think about any move before having the ball in your hands, and it disrupts your concentration for making the catch in the first place.
- The focus of catching a ball should be the tip, not the middle. That gives you the best opportunity to make the catch.
- The best hand position for catching a ball is with both of your thumbs and both of your forefingers almost touching in a diamond pattern. Catch with your hands and arms, and not with your body.
- Just like with running backs, a well-rounded and successful wide receiver should be able to successfully block a charging defender, or help blocking down the field. Helping your teammates pull off a successful play by making a block will place you higher in the coaching staff's minds and will earn you more playing time and respect.
- Although playing catch is important, it's also important to practice against defenders while playing catch.
- Work on the little "deke" moves that can fake out a defender, like a head bob or a dropped shoulder.

DEFENSIVE BACKS

- An incomplete pass by the receiver is just as important as the big interception or the huge hit by a defensive back. Although it may not have the same impact, it's the net result is just like stopping a running back for no gain.

- Being aggressive is important for defensive backs. But being overly aggressive can end up costing a team. Sometimes going for the sure tackle or pushing the ball carrier out of bounds is more important than reaching for the interception or sizing the carrier up for the big lick.
- Be confident. Look to some of the best defensive backs who have played professionally. The likes of Dion Sanders may not be a shining example of a team player, but when he was on the field, he was brimming with confidence. A defensive back who hopes the ball doesn't come his way can end up being burned or being hurt.

KICKERS

- It's been proven that the soccer style of kicking (using the instep) instead of the straight-on style provides a much more accurate method of kicking.
- Allow your body to carry through with a good follow through. Keep your head down and watch your foot make contact with the ball. (This is the "keep your eye on the ball" for kickers.) And, keep your head down on the follow through, too. Have confidence in your linemen to make their blocks, and it will help you to develop this follow through technique. Also, make sure your leg's follow through is aimed at the target as well.
- The foot you plant with is as important as the foot doing the kicking. You should plant your foot right next to the ball, not behind or in front of the ball. At the point of contact, your plant foot should be perpendicular to the yard line.
- It's important to have enough time to practice. Sometimes, due to time restraints in an organized practice, the kickers won't be able to have enough time practicing in live situations. If this is the case, have the self-discipline to make time in your own schedule to practice. Repetition is the key to successful field goal kicking. If you have to, imagine defenders coming at you, while keeping your pace and rhythm steady.
- Your mechanics should never change, whether it's a chip shot field goal, or a long bomb. Doing a drill where you kick field goals from different distances heading away from the goal line, and then back again, is a good way to remind yourself to keep your mechanics the same.

NUTRITION

There can be no blanket nutritional diet for all football players, especially because of the various sizes and shapes that football players are. A 150-pound scat back is not going to need the same dietary restrictions as the 290-pound defensive lineman. And the swift-footed defensive back may have an extremely high metabolism, so the 2,000 calories he

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can consume in a day may be zeroed out by a good football workout, whereas that may put 5 pounds a week on the punter.

There are some basic nutritional guidelines that all football players can follow. However, it's very important for serious athletes to consult a dietary expert if you want a regimen that's suited for your personal body type.

It's also important for football players to stay hydrated and eat properly because of the incredible exertion that playing football puts on your body. Using fad diets or over-the-counter supplements may put your health at risk instead of achieving the desired results.

The following is a basic nutritional guideline for football players:

CARBS ARE THE KEY

When competing in sports where athletes' bodies run in cycles of expending an incredible amount of exertion followed by brief periods of rest, the main key to recovery is carbohydrates. The ideal diet should have 55 to 60 percent of the daily caloric intake as carbohydrates, 30 percent of the caloric intake as good fats, and 15 percent from proteins.

Low-fat foods with good carbohydrates are an excellent source of energy. Some of these foods include mashed potatoes, bagels, frozen yogurt, and grilled chicken. Make these choices instead of choosing French fries, doughnuts, ice cream, or fried chicken. These foods will help you achieve the amount of energy you need to compete in games and practices, and still have the energy to follow through with other daily activities.

SNACKING AFTER GAMES

In order to help your body recover after strenuous games or practices, it's important to refuel your body with a balanced mix of carbohydrates and proteins, at about a 6-to-1 ratio favoring carbohydrates.

Some good ideas for post-game snacks include sports bars with the appropriate amount of protein, yogurt with cereal, peanut butter crackers, trail mix, or a bagel with peanut butter or cream cheese. This should be eaten within a half hour of ending the workout for it to be the most benefit to your body.

PRE-GAME MEALS

The concept of the pre-game meal has always had its importance to football players. However, a football player should consider what he consumes during the entire day before the big game or a full practice or workout.

The best policy is to choose foods that are lower in fat. Because it takes so long for fat to be digested and move through the body, it can leave a football player feeling full and not

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having enough energy to make it through the big game. Meals early in the day should avoid fried fatty foods, like bacon, sausage, or potatoes. Lean protein sources will be much more beneficial, like cereal, bread, or toast. If your game is later in the day and your pre-game meal is a lunch or dinner meal, stick to broiled, grilled, or baked meats instead of fried. Choose a tomato-based sauce over a cream-based sauce. And choose steamed white rice or a baked potato over French fries.

The following menu selections make for good pre-game meals for football players:

- Cereal, fruit, and a smoothie
- Waffles, eggs, ham (not fried), and fruit
- Turkey or ham subs (skip the mayo but use mustard), frozen yogurt, fruit salad
- Cuts of 8-ounce steaks with a side of your favorite carbohydrate (rice, whole-wheat pasta, baked potato)
- Grilled chicken, whole-wheat pasta with red meat sauce, fruit, and a salad.

Remember to stay hydrated. Water, low-sugar juices, and sports drinks are all great drinks for football players.

POST-GAME MEAL

Immediately after a game, it's important to replenish fluids and have a light snack. (See above for suggestions for post-game snacks.) Not only does this help your body recover quicker, it will prevent you from overeating having a big meal. Athletes tend to be very hungry after a hard workout or a game, so this will help curb the appetite.

After that, a hearty post-game meal is in order. Here are some suggestions:

- Roast beef, salad, and mashed potatoes
- Rice with steak kabobs
- Hamburgers, baked potato, grilled chicken sandwich, and juice
- Green beans, corn, and salmon

CONDITIONING

It's important for football players to be in top physical condition, whether it's in the middle of the season, or before the season begins. The following is a basic guide to

conditioning. Remember to consult a doctor before starting any training regimen. Also remember to stretch before doing any workout, even if it's just going out for a run.

OFF-SEASON CONDITIONING

- **Day 1**
Run 3 miles (It may be necessary to run less when first starting to work into making it to three miles.)
- **Day 2**
Run sprints: First start with a stretch and a quarter mile run. Then do 10 sets of 10 yard runs, 10 sets of 20 yard runs, 10 sets of 40 yard runs, a quarter mile cool-down run, and then stretch again
- **Day 3**
Run 3 miles, work on skills important to your position, strength training
- **Day 4**
Repeat Day 2
- **Day 5**
Repeat Day 3
- **Day 6**
Repeat Day 2
- **Day 7**
Rest

IN-SEASON WORKOUTS

Do not let personal workouts interfere with any team directed workouts. If you belong to an organization and want to do workouts on your own, you or your personal trainer may want to consult the team physician or trainers to work out a plan for extra workouts.

In-season programs should include strength training, a full-body workout once a week and an additional upper-body workout. Do not strength train before practice. You should leave two to three full days between major workout sessions or between a major workout session and a game.

CONCLUSION

Football comes naturally to many athletes. But it's the smart athlete that concentrates on more than just his natural ability to make him a better football player.

Following these tips, techniques, and recommendations will help you play like the pros!

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