

Editor's Note



ur international readers know the word *football*—but most of them use it to name the sport that we in the United States call “soccer.” To us, football is something entirely different. Distinguishing between the two sports sometimes requires adding an adjective and calling the U.S. game “*American* football.”

But I have always known the sport simply as football. When I was growing up, we always had a football around the house—first a small plastic one, later an undersized rubber one, and then, when my brothers’ hands were big enough to hold it, a leather football closer to regulation size.

We lived in a neighborhood with a lot of kids and a couple of empty lots, so it wasn’t hard for my brothers to get a football game going almost any time they felt like it. The friends who showed up were a mix of sizes and abilities, so to avoid injuries, they always played touch football—specifically “two-hand touch”—instead of tackling ball carriers.

Although touch football was less hazardous than the full contact version of the sport, what those boys avoided in physical conflict, they seemed to make up for in verbal combat. From time to time, heated arguments broke out when a player running with the ball insisted that he had scored a touchdown because the defense had tagged him with only one hand. Invariably, the tagging player was just as sure that he had slapped the runner with both hands—although he might later admit, reluctantly, that his second hand had merely grazed a shirttail.

A referee would have come in handy to settle such disputes. But the two teams always came to some agreement when everyone realized that getting back to the game was more fun than standing around arguing. Then, once again, shouts and cries of boys enjoying a favorite sport would echo in the air.

Our neighborhood was not too different from many neighborhoods all over the country where packs of boys get together to play football, honing the skills that could one day earn them a spot on a high school football team, and maybe if they are talented enough, and driven enough, and maybe lucky enough, eventually find them playing college football.

But football players of any age are likely to be fans of one of the 32 professional teams in the National Football League (NFL). Men, women, and children all over the United States enjoy watching and cheering for their favorite NFL teams. We hope you’ll sense some of the excitement they feel when you read about “action on the gridiron.”