

# John B. Foster's Annual Gridiron Forecast. Analysis of Rules and Outline of New Plays to Follow Change in Code . . .

BY JOHN B. FOSTER.

SINCE the congress of the rule makers, following the congress of the colleges, football has been experimental. It will be experimental again this year. From a creation of fact it has retrograded or progressed—as the reader is of the old school or the new—to a condition of evolution.

No matter whether the present condition is pleasant to the football enthusiast or not it is not a theory which confronts those who are fond of the autumn pastime. It is a very real condition, out of which it will take effort, patient and concerted effort, to bring back a game which shall eventually become standard, so that it will be possible to compare again with intelligence successive annual achievements of the various colleges and universities.

There has been no standard since the rules were first revised. The style of game has varied so under the modifications, which were put into effect by well meaning reconstructionists that football has been more or less a hodge-podge for the last few seasons.

## It Took Time.

The first year that the forward pass was made permissible the college teams played until well along in November before they discovered what could be accomplished by the forward pass in the game. They did not know how to use it until Yale paved the way by showing an entirely new manoeuvre against Princeton. It was such a powerful play, and productive of so much good to Yale, that other colleges attempted it and a year or so later the very men who had made the play possible decided to restrict it because it did not conform with the somewhat uncertain idea of the game that they had in mind. It seemed to lead to roughness and the theory of evolved football is to eliminate as much as possible all roughness from field activity.

Not that football is to be made a pastime for weaklings, or those whose precaution is more abundantly developed than their courage, but to do away with the banging, the bouncing, and the general bumping which had been the cause of publication of more than one wildly exaggerated injury list.

So if the game, which will again be disarranged, and which will present entirely new features this year, is not to the liking of everybody who plays it or who sees it played, the way to help matters is not to sit idly by and abuse those who are struggling with a task which has measured itself ably against them, but to assist in every way to bring the sport nearer to the happy day when it will be agreed to let the rules alone for a while.

**Serious Weakness.**  
The weakness of the football rules, as they existed in 1911 was that, strictly observed, it was not always possible for the team which played the best football to win under their wording. That is a condition which will quickly dishearten the votaries of any sport, and it is to the credit of the rule committee that they were quick to co-operate with the press, which called for changes before the season was two-thirds completed.

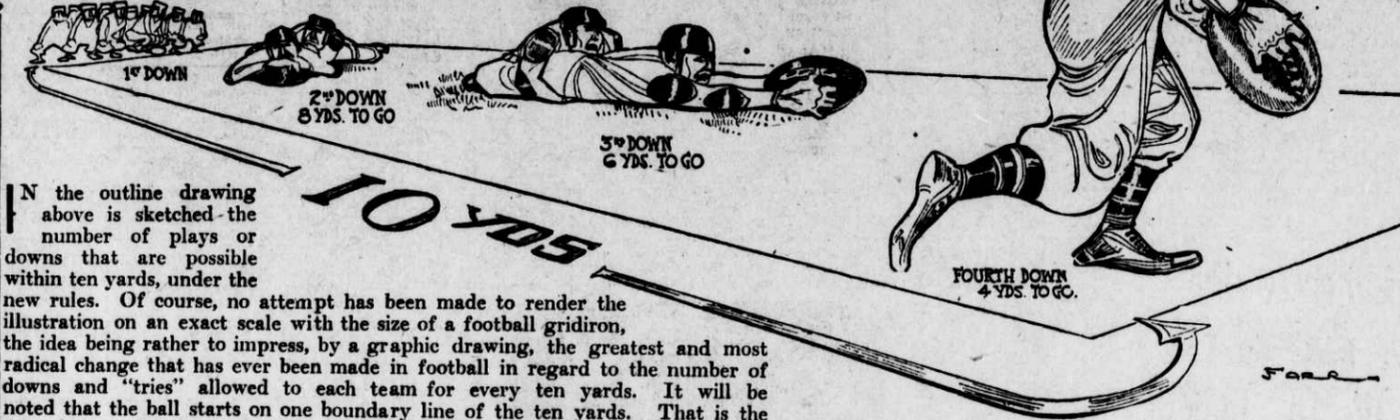
An eleven by excellent work might carry the ball to within five yards of the opposing goal and then lose it in the effort to make a touchdown. That might happen half a dozen times in the course of a contest. To try to score a touchdown is one of the most praiseworthy points that a team can make. Football has been built around that. What can there be more satisfactory than to cross the line of the enemy in a perfectly fair and honorable manner? It may be galling to the defending side, yet, as in all honorable contests, there is prize for the loser as well as the winner.

Imagine, however, the effect that it had in an eleven of fairly good players when three or four times they penetrated the lines of the enemy to within a few feet of their goal, only to be beaten by the other side, which never once was nearer to the goal line opposite them than thirty yards, but was provided with some accurate kicker who, in a half dozen attempts, managed to get the ball once between the goal posts and over the bar.

**Not Balanced.**  
On the one side there was an exhibition of that football which is the basic principle of the sport, the football which is football of the Rugby type. On the other side a specialized player, assisted by others who were not necessarily high class football players, could offset all the work of eleven good men on the opposing side and almost do the work of eleven men on his own side.

When the rules were first changed, and when the modification was made which permitted players to be dropped out and others take their places, with still further liberty permitting the original players to return, it was the writer who called attention to the fact that this would eventually work to the disadvantage of the game in general, in that it would pave the way for the specialized player, the man who could do but one thing, and who, after he had done that, would be dropped out of the contest to make room for a better all around player.

It so happened. The pinch kicker came to have his place in football as the pinch



IN the outline drawing above is sketched the number of plays or downs that are possible within ten yards, under the new rules. Of course, no attempt has been made to render the illustration on an exact scale with the size of a football gridiron, the idea being rather to impress, by a graphic drawing, the greatest and most radical change that has ever been made in football in regard to the number of downs and "tries" allowed to each team for every ten yards. It will be noted that the ball starts on one boundary line of the ten yards. That is the first down. On the next down, or first try, two yards are gained. On the third down, or second try, two yards more are gained. Under the old rule by the figure at the end of the diagram, with the ball in his possession, about to kick after the fourth down, because the ten yards have not been gained. If the side in possession of the ball did not elect to kick, it would be permissible to advance the ball by a running formation. If the distance were not up in scrimmage to advance the ball. Were the old rule in effect, the ball would have gone to the side not in possession of the ball, on or near the spot where the third down is noted.

OLD GRIDIRON	
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20	
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35	
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45	
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85	
90	
95	
100	
105	
110	

NEW GRIDIRON	
10	
20	
30	
40	
50	
60	
70	
80	
90	
100	

committee in the winter of 1911, favored the team carrying the ball as opposed to the team defending the goal. This, of course, follows the theory that the game had proved a deterrent to a team which possessed a brilliant football attack but which found it unable to penetrate a concentrated defence beyond the twenty-five yard line.

The presumption is that players will find it less severe to try to advance the ball over a field which is bisected at fifty yards. How much less severe remains to be proved. It always has been the contention of players that the last five yards of the attack are the hardest to force. That is true, not so much because of exhaustion on the part of the attacking side, as of resolution on the part of the defending side.

The chances are that the length of the gridiron was reduced along the line of making the game less trying for younger players. Collectively, I presume that the amputation of ten yards of playing surface will result in the saving of a great deal of physical energy. If one knew the statistics of saving throughout the United States, yet young blood is so prone to besir itself, and romp around, that whether the playing area is 110 yards or 100 yards, the chances are that each of the contestants will be equally tired.

much about the fourth down in football because the fourth down and the first down were sort of synonymous, as it were. The referee called out, "first down, four yards to gain; second down, three yards to gain; third down, two yards to gain," but the fourth down never materialized. It resolved itself into the first down for the attack or the defence.

This season there will be an actual fourth down. In other words, the attacking side will have three tries with the ball. The referee will call first down, second down, third down and fourth down, if necessary.

It was well established last year by systematic review of the games which were played throughout the United States that the teams could not gain successfully on the four down but ten yards.

The average distance gained was less than eight yards, in fact, nearer seven yards, as the rules provided for ground gaining in 1911. In other words, the ten yard four down rule was a farce. It simply meant that players could run their legs off with practically no assurance that they were about to accomplish anything. Naturally that was not good sport, and football, like any other pastime, must be good sport if it is to be made enjoyable.

112 YARD GRIDIRON CONSIDERED BY RULES COMMITTEE	
8	
16	
24	
32	
40	
48	
56	
64	
72	
80	
88	
96	
104	
112	

better has his place in baseball. Both are modifications of the original idea of the sports to which they owe allegiance. The primary intention of football and the primary intention of baseball is that the contests shall be decided by a certain number of men, representing each side engaged, who are to take and make the fortunes of the games as they come, and not by a certain number of players who bear the brunt of the battle to a point where they are to be relieved by a certain number of specialists who can perform but one feat.

**New Gridiron This Year.**  
First of all, the change of the size of the gridiron will be considered. It has been shortened to 100 yards in length. By the way, this is a concession to the attacking side. Later on as the various changes in the rules are taken up it will be observed that much of the modification made by the

stopped within fair ground than in touch, so that the extra five yards which have been added to the first effort of the attack are a little tax which the rules committee has imposed on the side first in possession of the ball. As most of the impacts have been placed on the side which defends the goal against the attack, this extra five yards perhaps will not prove to be any very serious factor in settling the probable benefits of this year's changes.

**Radical Change.**  
Now, in connection with the shortened gridiron comes one of the most radical departures in the history of football. It is a question as to how well it will work out, and is the greatest concession which has been made to those who have not only insisted but have proved that the game as played in 1911 was unbalanced and unequal.

This year the number of downs will be five instead of four. One never heard

of the fourth down in football because the fourth down and the first down were sort of synonymous, as it were. The referee called out, "first down, four yards to gain; second down, three yards to gain; third down, two yards to gain," but the fourth down never materialized. It resolved itself into the first down for the attack or the defence.

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There were exceptions now and then when some eleven would carry the ball brilliantly over the field. Yale made one or two or three such efforts in its games. By strategy and clever manoeuvring the players got within the twenty-five yard zone by advancing the ball strictly within the intent of the sport.

Once within the twenty-five yard zone the defending side concentrated its players against the team with the ball and almost invariably the attacking side suddenly had to fall back on the attempt to kick a field goal or was compelled to surrender the ball with the goal in sight but impossible to accomplish when the number of downs permissible was not in direct proportion to the distance which had to be gained.

The writer went back to the detailed accounts of games which had been played in 1909, 1910 and 1911 and, carefully going over the statements as to the distance gained on the prescribed number of downs, came to the conclusion that it

would be better for the sport if the gridiron were changed to one of 112 yards, the number of downs to be retained at three, and the distance to be retained at ten. This would have brought forward a gridiron 112 yards in length equally subdivided by parallels drawn at distances of eight yards each.

Of course this gridiron of 112 yards, with its eight yard parallels and its three downs, was based on the presumption that most of the other rules would be retained, permitting the forward pass and such plays as had been introduced into the game with the original revision.

**More Endurance Demanded.**  
The 112-yard gridiron was considered, but it was the opinion of some that it tended to make the game one requiring more endurance on the part of the players.

## BALL IN PLAY FROM 20-YARD LINE AFTER TOUCHBACK

WHEN a touchback takes place in a football game this year the ball will be brought out to the twenty yard line and put into play. In other years it was put in play on the twenty-five yard line.

There had been some demand for this change even before the field was shortened to 100 yards. The argument which had been advanced against the twenty-five yard line was that too much penalty was placed on a team which had successfully advanced the ball.

For instance, suppose that team A had carried the ball from its five yard line to the ten yard line of team B on the other side of the field, by excellent work. At that point an attempt was made at a field goal as last resort rather than lose the ball without one opportunity to gain points.

The attempt to kick goal failed and the ball under the rule had to be taken out to the twenty-five yard line and put in play by the team defending the goal. Thus the team, which had been in possession of the ball, and which lost it on the ten yard line of its rivals was compelled to submit to a penalty of fifteen yards taken away from the distance which it actually had gained by clever work. There were some who believed that it was penalty enough

to lose the ball without losing distance as well.

**Without Gain.**  
In fact there have been advocates for a rule, which would merely give the defending team possession of the ball, and compel it to put the ball in play on the point where the attacking team lost possession of it, claiming that to be quite enough disadvantage to any team which had shown ability to gain ground well.

Out of all the points, which have been brought forward in regard to the play out privilege the modification has resulted, and goes into effect this season, by which the ball is advanced from the twenty yard line after the failure of some play has dropped it into touchback.

Twenty yards seem fair enough in view of the reduced area of the field and the further fact that there will be more persistent attempt to make gain by touch-downs this year than has been the case in the last three seasons.

Another change, which has been made in the rules, has increased the value of a touchdown to six points. This has been contended for in the last three seasons. Quicker enough there is a difference of opinion about the intrinsic worth of football points which is worthy of mention.

The old time football players, those

whose experience with the game dates back to the earliest contests, lean kindly toward field goals. It was the kicking of goals which was esteemed a particularly able play in their days. A more modern school, which has grown up with the football of the Rhodes, Cowan, Gordon Brown, Haughton type, prefers the touchdown as the exemplification of excellent football, maintaining that a clean advance over the line of the enemy by the use of strategy and by the exercise of good plays is a superior test of the players engaged.

The sentiment in favor of the touchdown has strengthened rather than decreased in the experience of the teams since the code of rules was changed.

**Good Fortune.**  
Too often a team which played football of a less advanced and better defined type than an adversary was fortunate enough to work the ball within fair kicking distance of the goal line and score from that point because of the possession of a skillful drop kicker. The result was that two field goals were worth more than one touchdown, the latter representing most creditable play, and the former perhaps having a shade of good luck with it.

This season a touchdown is worth six

points. Hence two field goals at the best cannot more than tie a score when the goal from touchdown is missed. Perhaps that is a fair test of value, for two field goals may be made very skillfully, and, if they are, a touchdown, which has been wrought only by hard and enduring football, balances their value, assisted by the further fact that the touchdown will give the team which successfully made it an opportunity to kick goal and increase its points to seven.

The fact that there is frequently a great deal of idleness in kicking goal after a touchdown also had its effect in bringing about a change of the scoring rule.

Football men thought that much was sacrificed when after a touchdown had been successfully made at a bad angle, and the punt out was unfortunate, the game might be lost because of the hazard which was attendant upon making a goal from touch-downs.

**Will End Comment.**  
The new system in scoring points is likely to put an end to much of the after game comment which has been heard in recent years to the effect that so and so won, but the other team played better football, for a team which can score by touchdown in one half must not grumble

if it is not strong enough to prevent the opposing team from scoring twice by field goal in the same half.

That much debated point in the Princeton-Dartmouth game of last season, when the ball rolled along the field after a poor try for field goal, struck an obstruction and bounded over the cross bar of the goal, is settled for good and all.

The referee felt in duty bound to give the point to Princeton under the rules in 1911, as the ball did pass between the goal posts and over the cross bar. However, as the experience in the kick was plainly absent by the manner of its execution and the scoring of the goal was purely an accident, much sympathy was expressed for Dartmouth, and to the credit of the Princeton men it may be said that some of them who had made harmless wagers with Dartmouth on the outcome of the game refused to accept their payment.

The rules plainly state now that no goal shall be credited to a team when the ball touches the ground during its flight in a place of drop kick. There will be no more fluke goals like that of 1911, and while the experience of Dartmouth was severe the outcome of the game was surely established a better and a plainer rule.

## Radical Changes in Rules to Develop Running Game This Season.

### GRIDIRON IS SHORTER

### Four Downs To Be Allowed to the Side Which Is in Possession of the Ball.

something which the committee was trying to moderate rather than increase. That opinion seems to be rather far fetched, in view of the fact that the players would be required to gain but six feet more than they were asked to gain under the old rules.

As the game had been played, the information being gleaned from the accounts of games of three years as has been stated, it had been found that eleven were fairly lucky when they gained eight yards in four downs. By reducing the number of yards to be gained from ten to eight and so rearranging the gridiron that there could be no possible chance to confuse the players, it was the opinion of the writer and of some of the expert football men of the East that a happy solution of the difficulty which had beset the game had been found.

However, no fault is to be found with the committee, which finally took the other side of the question and increased the number of downs, for it was a plain concession that the rules, as they existed, needed modification. More than that, it proved effectually that the rule makers could perceive that something was wrong with a game which prevented the ball being advanced with success, except when some spectacular play proved of advantage to the attacking side. In other words, it had been found that too much of a premium had been placed on that fungous outgrowth of the game, the forward pass.

**Better in Long Run.**  
The writer is fairly well satisfied from the general data which he gathered in regard to the games which were played through three seasons that the 112-yard gridiron with its eight-yard gain on four downs would have proved better in the long run than the 100-yard gridiron with five downs. That is, he is so satisfied at the present time, that is, he is not satisfied by which to make a comparison except the rule which was in vogue and the actual results on the gridiron. It may be that the new rule, with a gridiron of 100 yards and an added down, will prove to be exactly the remedy which is needed in football to make it more an even contest than it has been.

For that reason every trial this year of the new method will be watched with the greatest attention. Possibly there will not be the benefit which is expected from the changes that have been put into effect, and if the benefit does not materialize the Football Rules Committee will find that it is to their advantage to try the 112 yard gridiron and the eight yard gain on four downs.

So long as football is in the experimental stage there is not likely to develop any harm by making use of every method which seems as if it may be of advantage. Out of it a standard will surely be established, and once that standard is ascertained players of the future will conform to it and make their best efforts to correspond with it.

**Forward Pass May Score.**  
There is still another fact which is to be taken into consideration in the change which has been made in the length of the gridiron and the number of downs, and that is that a forward pass will be allowed to score over the goal line for a distance of ten yards.

This is another departure from the original scope of football. For that matter anything which pertains to the forward pass is a departure from the intent of the game. This amendment to the rules means that the defending side will no longer be able to bring forward its backs and man them with the forwards when the attack is trying to advance the ball within the twenty-five yard line.

It certainly is the severest blow which has been aimed at the defence since the new code has been in existence. One trouble with the changes in the rules was their tendency to make the defence strong against the team trying to advance the ball. It was not good football and it brought about the Jug handled game, to which objection was made not only by players but by spectators, and by old football men who had given the subject study.

So long as it will be possible this year for any team to score by making a forward pass which is caught on a ten yard line back of the goal or between that ten yard line and the goal line, it is evident that it will be necessary to employ two backs in long range defence.

**Backs Can't Help Forwards.**  
One will not do. Two are likely to have their hands filled. If the backs must range about the goal line it will be out of the question for them to be within helping distance of their forwards. Therefore, if the attacking team comes down to the twenty-five yard line on its first down, it will require the best of skillful defence to prevent the team from gaining another ten yards.

If there is a weak forward, or if the ends can be run, it is evident that the attacking side will gain because the backs will not be close up for secondary defence. If they are drawn inside to the defence of their team what more can be expected than a sudden forward pass to one flank or the other, where there is no one guarding against such an emergency?

"Without doubt the back field of 1911 in football will find its work increased and more than ever the captains and the coaches of eleven will find that they will have to select for their back field men who are rugged and yet fleet of foot and men who can start quickly and who are quick to diagnose the plays of opposing sides."

All this has been made necessary by the shortened field, the increased number of downs and the fact that a forward pass can score this year. These three plays came strictly within the open field work,