

# How does the world of gridiron work then?

## Rules of American Football

MOST people have a basic understanding of the rules of American football — one team has the ball and attempts to run with it or throw it down the field to score a touchdown. There are words like field goal, wide receiver, quarter-back and sack flying around as well, so here we give you a quick guide to the rule book.

### The players:

Each team has three separate units: the offense, those players who are on the field when the team has possession of the ball; the defense, players who line up to stop the other team's offense; and special teams that only come in on kicking situations (punts, field goals, and kickoffs). Only 11 players are on the field from one team at any one time.

One team has possession of the football and tries to advance the ball down the field by running with the ball or throwing it - and score points by crossing into the end zone for a touchdown. The field measures 100 yards long and 53 yards wide.

### First down:

All progress in a football game is measured in yards. The offensive team tries to get as much "yardage" as it can to try and move closer to the opponent's end zone. Each time they have four downs, or chances, in which to gain 10 yards. If the offensive team successfully moves the ball 10 or more yards, it earns a first down, and another set of four downs. If the offense fails to gain 10 yards, it loses possession of the ball. If the offense reaches fourth down, it usually punts the ball forcing the other team to begin its drive further down the field.

### The four ways of scoring:

A touchdown, when the offence cross into the end zone, is worth six points and it allows the scoring team an opportunity to attempt to get an extra point.

The extra point is kicked but the team also has the option of a two-point conversion in the same manner as a touch-down.

Teams can kick a field goal, worth three points from anywhere on the field in possession, though generally are kicked from inside the defense's 45-yard line on fourth down.

Teams can also get two points via a safety when the ball carrier is tackled behind his own goal line.

### Time keeping:

Games are divided into four 15-minute quarters, separated by a 12-minute break at half-time. If a game is tied at the end of regulation, a 15-minute overtime period will be played. In the NFL, this is sudden death and the first team to score wins.

## WHY THIS WEEKEND IS THE BEST TO GET YOURSELF

# A whole ball

## FOUR SUPERSTARS

WE'RE big fans of the NFL in the Evening Echo office — well not all of us but this column certainly is — and this is our attempt to convert you non-believers before it's too late.



**EAMONN MURPHY**

There are three games left in Sky Sports' excellent coverage of the NFL with a potentially classic double-header of conference championship deciders on Sunday night leading into Super-bowl XLI on Sunday February 4.

The New Orleans Saints are the classic underdogs of 2006-07 as a rebuilt team courtesy of young coach Sean Payton dragged itself from a 3-13 win-loss record last season into the playoffs. They have also helped revitalise the spirit of a city devastated by Hurricane Katrina — can they go all the way? They face a pumped up Bears team looking to emulate the class of '85 who landed Super Bowl XX; Chicago are tough in defence but major question marks dog quarter-back Rex Grossman.

The franchise of the decade, the New England Patriots, guided by coach Bill Belichick and quarter-back Tom Brady, are chasing a fourth Super Bowl ring. They were sporadically impressive during the regular season but are

playoff kings. Can they reign in Indianapolis? They travel to tame the Colts, who have shown a massive improvement in defence against the running game in the post-season and in Peyton Manning and coach Tony Dungy they bristle with potential.

Here we look at four of the star players that will go head to head on Sky Sports 2 from 8pm, as well as giving you a quick beginner's guide to one of the greatest games on the planet.

**Live on Sunday night Sky Sports 2 from 8pm the NFL Conference Championships:**

- **NFC Championship Game:** New Orleans @ Chicago
- **AFC Championship Game:** New England @ Indianapolis

### Weekend Betting from Cashman's:

- New Orleans to win — evens
- Chicago Bears to win — 4-5
- New Orleans + 2.5 — 10-11
- Chicago Bears - 2.5 — 10-11
- New England Patriots to win — 11-8
- Indianapolis Colts to win — 4-7
- New England Patriots + 3.5 — 10-11
- Indianapolis Colts - 3.5 — 10-11

### BRIAN URLACHER

**No 54 — Linebacker for the Chicago Bears**

**College:** New Mexico

**Height:** 6-4

**Weight:** 258

**Born:** 25/5/1978

**Acquired:** As the ninth pick overall in the 2000 draft.

WHILE flashy running backs and receivers, glacial place kickers and visionary quarter-backs all fascinate, there is something really appealing about the type of NFL players who gets fed raw meat on a rather large stick. Brian Urlacher is one of those players, chained up until the weekends when he is unleashed on an unsuspecting offence. He is a middle linebacker, a beast who must attack the quarter-back, running backs or anyone who crosses the line of scrimmage and into his path.

Urlacher is one of those players who was born to play for a team with a ferocious name like the Panthers, Lions, or as it turned out the Bears (he was never going to end up playing in a sport where they're called the Cubs now was he?)

Considered a bad boy, though not up there with the likes of Raven Ray Lewis who was once charged with murder, Urlacher briefly dated Paris Hilton and fathered a child with a former stripper Tyna Robertson, who once tried to sue Michael Flatley.

Unsurprisingly he also enjoys watching professional wrestling, and even wrestled under the name The Worm!

Bears' fans consider Urlacher to be one of the 'Monsters of the Midway', a Valhalla of Bears' icons including (the wonderfully named) Dick Butkus, Mike Ditka, and 'Samurai' Mike Singletary.

He's been inconsistent through the years but on form he is one of the best defenders in the game.

If the Bears are to maul the underdogs the Saints their bad-ass defence will be the key — Reggie Bush and co beware!

### ADAM VINATIERI

**No 4 — Place Kicker for the Indianapolis Colts**

**College:** South Dakota State

**Height:** 6-0

**Weight:** 202

**Born:** 28/12/1972

**Acquired:** As a free agent from the Patriots on March 22, 2006

PLACE KICKERS don't tend to get much respect from their fellow players, fans or even casual followers of American football.

They're the guys who stroll on to kick a field-goal attempt or touchdown conversion — they're not real players then are they? There is one place kicker though, who has earned the respect of everyone — Adam Vinatieri — the ultimate clutch kicker.

It's a great US sporting expression: the clutch shot/kick/drive i.e. the game-winning effort. And in that regard, Vinatieri is up there with the Michael Jordans of this world.

Twice, in Super Bowl XXXVI and Super Bowl XXXVIII he drilled the game-winning field goals for the Patriots, while back in the 2001 playoffs,

during a blizzard, he kicked what is considered the greatest field goal of all time, a 45-yarder against the Oakland Raiders to tie a game they went on to win in overtime.

After the season though, the Patriots chose not to place the franchise tag on Vinatieri

as they had the year before, allowing him to become a free agent.

He's proved his worth since signing with the Colts — he hasn't missed a kick through the uprights in the RCA Dome and just last week he kicked every point in a 15-6 upset of the Baltimore Ravens.

And he is facing this weekend? Yes, his old teammates in the AFC final.

Stick a tenner on Vinatieri kicking (or missing) the winning goal in the dying seconds.

