American football as we know it today was developed in the late 19th century from two English sports; soccer and rugby. In 1876, the Intercollegiate Football Association was formed, and this organization developed many uniform rules of the game including setting the line of scrimmage, the system of downs and scoring. The regulation football field was set at 300 feet (100 yards) in length from goal line to goal line and the width is 160 feet (53 1/3 yards). The end zones are 30 feet (10 yards) in depth.

Eleven players make an official team. There are positions on offense and defense with a few specialty positions. The object of the game is to move the ball down the field and score down at your opponent’s end zone. Scoring can be done by either running or passing the ball over the goal line for a touchdown. A team can also score on offense by kicking a field goal through the goal posts and the defense can score by forcing a safety. The offense has four downs (chances) to get a first down, which is ten yards in length. There are four quarters in a game of football and if the score is tied after four quarters there is an overtime period. The team with the most points after four quarters is declared the winner.

Rules for Madison Middle School football games:
1. The game is started with a punt, 10 steps in from the end zone. If the ball goes out of bounds it can be re-kicked once or placed where the ball went out of bounds. The receiving team chooses the re-kick or the out of bounds spot. If the ball is kicked out of the opposing end zone it will be placed 10 steps in from that end zone.
2. The receiving team can catch the ball or pick it up off the field and begin to advance it towards their goal line. The person running with the ball can be stopped by a one-handed touch. The kicking team may not recover the ball on a kick-off.
3. The Frisbee is then placed on the field as the down marker under the football. It is only moved to mark the new line of scrimmage once a first down is made.
4. The offensive team is then given 4 downs (chances) to gain a first down.
5. Team members must count off to take turns being the quarterback. The quarterback is responsible for calling the plays in the huddle. The quarterback must tell his/her team members what side of the ball to stand on and what pass pattern to run. All players will take a turn to be the quarterback. The quarterback will remain in that position until a touchdown is scored or until the other team gains possession of the ball.
6. All team members should have equal opportunities to catch a pass.
7. The next numbered quarterback will act as the Center to snap the ball. After the ball is snapped this player may go out and run their pass pattern.
8. If the ball is fumbled on the snap it is a dead ball and a loss of the down.
9. The defense will play person to person coverage. The defender that is covering the quarterback will count; “1 banana, 2 banana...5 banana” before rushing the quarterback. After “5 banana” the defense may cross over the line of scrimmage to tag the quarterback.

10. A team may lateral pass a ball at any time.

11. If a team has not scored or made a first down by the 3rd down and they are still close to their own goal line, that team may choose to punt the ball to the defensive team. The offense must let the defense know they are going to punt.

12. Blocking is done by positioning one’s body between the ball carrier and the opponent. No body contact is allowed.

13. After a touchdown (6 points) the ball and Frisbee are placed 3 steps from the end zone and the extra point is attempted. The extra point is scored by passing and catching or running the ball in the end zone. This is worth one point. (Typically, this point is scored by kicking the ball through the goal posts.)

14. After the extra point attempt the scoring team then punts to the receiving team at the other end of the field.

Terminology

Pass – ball thrown forward
Lateral – ball thrown backward or sideways
Incomplete pass – a ball thrown forward that no one catches
Complete pass – a ball thrown forward and caught by a member of the offense
Interception – a ball thrown forward and caught by a member of the defense
Quarterback – position of the person doing the passing
Receiver – player to whom the pass is thrown
Center – player hiking the ball
Running Back -
Punt – a ball kicked out of the hands, used to start the game, after a score and on 6th down
Fumble – a dropped ball
Line of scrimmage – where the ball is placed down after a runner is tagged (nose of football)
Neutral Zone – that place on the field between the nose and butt of the football, extended to sidelines; no one is allowed in there; except the Center’s hand.
Penalty – when one or more players break a rule:
Off-sides/False Start – when one or more players are on the wrong side of the ball. (loss of down, or 5 yard penalty)

Illegal block – When a player uses a hand, foot, arm or leg to block an opponent. (15 yard penalty)

Sideline – the line along the side of the field that runs the length of the field (120 yards long)

Endzone – the 10 yard area at the end of the playing field where a touchdown, safety or touchback occur.

Unsportsmanlike conduct – when someone plays unfair or is argumentative (15 yard penalty)