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INSIDE FOOTBALL

by *Bill Duffy*
former Daily Sports Editor

HOMEMAKER EDITOR Nancy Merchant was the last person the writer of this article wanted to run into during the late summer days, but of course he did.

"Where's the story?", was her terse greeting.

This was a good question — but the answer wasn't so good. I'd started the story twice, and dropped it twice.

The assignment was infinitely simple . . . "About 600 words on football for a readership of women." The only trouble is that in this day of high-gear football maneuvering 600 words are hardly enough to get many game-goers past the stage of finding their reserved seats.

Football terminology, not lack of interest, is what stops many inexperienced spectators cold. Many such "beginners" let terms like "T Formation" and "Screen Pass" slow them down. These are the things they should be least concerned with. Most such football jargon only indicates roundabout means to the grid sport's simple ends.

Watching football IS harder than it used to be. Lacking, among other things, the forward pass, the early game boiled down to each team taking four tries in which to try and move the ball 10 yards by brute force and running power. Since only ground plays were used, the defensive team could bunch in tight, and the result was a strictly short-gain, mostly-colorless brand of football.

Today, those teams out on the field still get four tries at making 10 yards on their way to the opponents' goal, but things are a bit more complicated now.

— But without concerning oneself with the background and evolution of football, what are some guides to enjoying the sport from the spectator standpoint? Here are a few:

1. USE THE GUIDES AIMED AT AIDING THE SPECTATOR — A starter here is the scoreboard. A glance at it after every play does two things for the watcher. One is to tell just what the preceding play produced in the way of yardage. The other is to give

an idea of what yardage and perhaps what strategy may be called for on the next play. The public address system is most useful to the spectator as an interpreter of the referee's signals, most of which are connected with rules infractions, and many of which are strictly Greek to most fans. Learn to use such aids as the sideline "chain," too.

2. DON'T GLUE YOUR EYES TO THE PLAYER WITH THE BALL — If you think it's hard following a football play from your elevated seat in the stadium, consider the man on the field whose job it is to picture the given play on a moment's notice in the huddle, pick out a certain man or area on the defensive team's side and then deliver his block or fake in a certain manner. A good football player is one who can clean up the moment's mental work instantaneously and deliver his physical duty automatically. Good width of vision, both physical and mental, is a must for him, and the same qualities in a lesser amount help the spectator to enjoy the game more. Learn to guess a pass play is in the offing by noticing if the offensive team is sending men spraying into the defensive backfield. Know where the ball is, but learn to take your eyes away from it to watch offensive players deliver their blocks or carry out their fakes. About 98 percent of football is played far from the ball itself, and realization of this is important to the watcher.

3. DEVELOP A SENSE OF ANTICIPATION OF WHAT IS COMING NEXT — A team with a small, unsafe lead late in a game isn't likely to be passing the ball much or otherwise playing fancy-pants football — chances for losing the lead on an intercepted pass or fumble are too great; a team with great speed is likely to run the ball around the ends and not so much through the middle; unless within 40 yards of a score, the offensive team probably will give the ball over by kicking to the other team when fourth down comes around. Common sense, not technical knowledge of the game, is most important here. You'll follow play much better if you suspect what is to come, and common sense plus concentration on the game will tell you sometimes just about what is coming.

Only the barest knowledge of football's rules is enough for enjoyment of the sport, if it's accompanied by something more than a passing interest.

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