DraftKids

PRINTABLE · GRADES 6-8 · AGES 11–14

Forward Pass Revolution

Read the article about how one rule change helped save football, then answer. Some answers are stated in the text. Others need evidence and careful reasoning. The history is real. Teams and players on page 2 are made up.

Name _____

Date _____

READING TOOLKIT

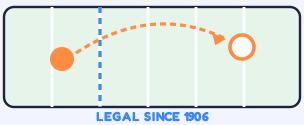
Context clue — nearby words that explain a new word

Central idea — what the whole text is mostly about

Evidence — the exact sentence that proves it

Problem & fix — what went wrong and what changed

Then vs. now — compare old rules with today's



THE FORWARD PASS

READ THE ARTICLE

The Throw That Saved Football

1 In the fall of 1905, college football was in trouble. Most plays were **mass formations**, in which teammates locked arms and charged forward in a tight pack while defenders piled on top. The pileups were brutal. That season, 18 football players died and 159 were seriously injured. Some colleges, including Columbia, dropped the sport, and critics wanted to **abolish** it everywhere.

2 President Theodore Roosevelt loved football, but he believed it had to change to survive. On October 9, 1905, he invited coaches and leaders from Harvard, Yale and Princeton to the White House and urged them to clean up the game. On December 28, 1905, 62 schools met in New York and formed the **Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS)**, a group of colleges created to reform the rules. In 1910, it took a new name: the NCAA.

3 The new rules for 1906 were designed to spread players out. Teams now had to gain 10 yards in three downs, instead of 5 yards, to earn a first down. A **neutral zone**, a gap the length of the ball, now separated the two lines before each play. Most important, the **forward pass** became legal. Each play could include one forward pass, thrown by a player who started behind the line of scrimmage. It could not cross the line within 5 yards of the center, and only the backs and the two ends could catch it.

4 Passing was a gamble. If a forward pass hit the ground without being touched, it was **incomplete**, and the ball went to the other team at the spot of the pass. That kind of **turnover** scared many coaches away. Not Eddie Cochems of Saint Louis University. On September 5, 1906, against Carroll College, his player Bradbury Robinson threw the first legal forward pass. It fell incomplete, so Carroll took the ball. Later in the game, Robinson completed a 20-yard touchdown pass to Jack Schneider, and Saint Louis won 22–0.

5 Rule makers kept adjusting. In 1907, they softened the punishment: an incomplete pass usually cost 15 yards instead of the ball. In 1912, teams got a fourth down to gain 10 yards, the field became 100 yards long, and a touchdown rose from 5 points to 6. Today, an incomplete pass simply stops the clock and costs the offense a down. More than a century later, the pass is the heart of the game.

ROOKIE

1 According to paragraph 1, how many football players **died** in the 1905 season?

_____ **players**

ROOKIE

2 In paragraph 2, what is the **IAAUS**? Use the clue right after the name.

_____

STARTER

3 In paragraph 1, the word **abolish** most likely means

A improve
B get rid of
C watch
D pay for

Letter _____

STARTER

4 According to paragraph 3, how many **forward passes** could a team throw on each play in 1906?

_____ **pass(es)**

PRO

5 Use paragraph 4. Robinson's first pass hit the ground untouched. Which **team** got the ball next?

Team _____

PRO

6 Which sentence best states the **central idea** of the whole article?

A Roosevelt invented the forward pass.
B A deadly season led to new rules, like the pass, that reshaped football.
C Saint Louis had the best team of 1906.
D Football rules have stayed the same since 1906.

Letter _____

ALL-STAR

7 **Problem and solution:** Paragraph 1 describes a problem. Name one 1906 rule from paragraph 3 that was meant to help solve it.

_____

_____

CHALLENGE ★

8 **Sequence:** Number the events 1 to 4 in the order they happened.

☐ A Saint Louis throws the first legal forward pass.
☐ B Roosevelt meets football leaders at the White House.
☐ C Teams get a fourth down to gain 10 yards.
☐ D 62 schools form the IAAUS in New York.

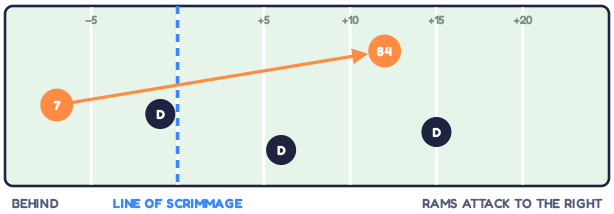
A Make the Call

Use today's rules to decide if each play is legal. Write the number of the rule that decides it.

Today's forward-pass rules (NFL and college): **1.** Only **one** forward pass is allowed on a play. **2.** A forward pass must be thrown from **behind** the line of scrimmage. **3.** A **backward** pass (a lateral) is legal anywhere on the field.

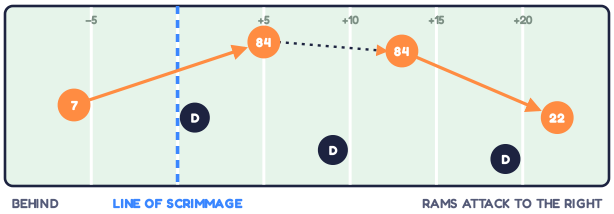
Ridgeview Rams player (number shown) · where he started · D = Lakeport Lynx defender · pass · run

1 **Play 1.** Rams QB #7 drops back 7 yards behind the line, then throws forward to #84, who is 12 yards past it.



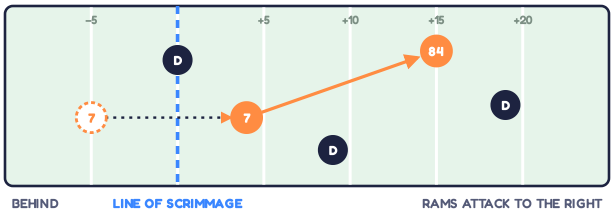
Circle: LEGAL / ILLEGAL Rule # _____

2 **Play 2.** #7 throws forward to #84. After the catch, #84 runs, then throws forward again to #22.



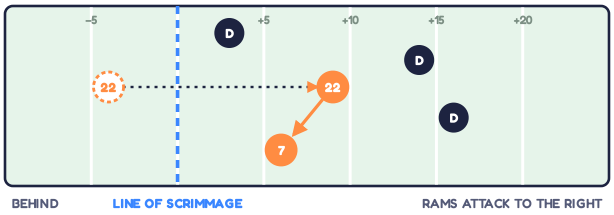
Circle: LEGAL / ILLEGAL Rule # _____

3 **Play 3.** #7 scrambles from 5 yards behind the line to 4 yards past it, then throws forward to #84.



Circle: LEGAL / ILLEGAL Rule # _____

4 **Play 4.** #22 runs 9 yards past the line, then tosses the ball backward to #7, who is trailing the play.



Circle: LEGAL / ILLEGAL Rule # _____

B Context Clue Words

Write the word or phrase from the bank that matches each meaning. Use clues in the article. One is not used.

Word bank: mass formation · neutral zone · incomplete · turnover · touchback

1 a gap the length of the ball that separates the two lines before a play

Word _____

2 a forward pass that hits the ground without being touched

Word _____

3 when the ball goes to the other team

Word _____

4 teammates locked together, charging forward in a tight pack

Word _____

C Then & Now

Fill in the 1906 rule from the article, and write the paragraph number where you found it.

RULE	IN 1906	TODAY	PARA.
Downs to gain 10 yards		**4 downs**	
Points for a touchdown		**6 points**	
An incomplete forward pass		**clock stops, offense loses a down**	

BONUS · YOUR TURN

Imagine you sat on the 1906 rules committee. Which old rule would you change first? **I would change ____ because ____.**

1 _____

2 _____

Answer Key (for teachers & parents)

Answers for **Forward Pass Revolution**, with sample wording where answers may vary. Print pages 1 and 2 for students, and keep this page for checking. For evidence answers, accept a quote or a close paraphrase. Article facts come from the NCAA's official history, the 1906 rule book as printed in the Harvard Crimson, and histories of the 1906 Saint Louis season.

Page 1 Problems

1. Answer: **18 players**
   Paragraph 1: "18 football players died and 159 were seriously injured."
2. Answer: **A group of colleges created to reform the rules**
   The phrase right after the name defines it (it became the NCAA).
3. Answer: **B (get rid of)**
   Clue: colleges had already dropped the sport; critics wanted it gone everywhere.
4. Answer: **1 forward pass**
   Paragraph 3: "Each play could include one forward pass."
5. Answer: **Carroll College**
   An untouched incomplete pass gave the ball to the other team at the spot of the pass.
6. Answer: **B**
   A and D are false, and C is a small detail. B covers the whole article.
7. Answer: **Answers vary**
   Legal forward pass, 10 yards for a first down, or the neutral zone: each spread players out of the dangerous pileups.
8. Answer: **B = 1, D = 2, A = 3, C = 4**
   Order B, D, A, C: Oct 1905, Dec 1905, Sept 1906, 1912.

A · Make the Call

1. Answer: **Legal**
   Rule 2: thrown from 7 yards behind the line.
2. Answer: **Illegal**
   Rule 1: #84's throw is a second forward pass on the same play.
3. Answer: **Illegal**
   Rule 2: #7 threw from 4 yards past the line.
4. Answer: **Legal**
   Rule 3: a backward pass is legal anywhere, even past the line.

Quick score

Page 1 problems	_____ / 8
A · Make the Call	_____ / 4
B · Context Clue Words	_____ / 4
C · Then & Now	_____ / 3
Total	**_____ / 19**

Skills practiced

Informational text · Sport history · Context clues · Central idea · Text evidence · Problem & solution · Sequencing · Compare & contrast · Applying a rule

Teaching tip: Before Section A, have students trace each play with a finger and stop at every throw: is the ball going forward, and where is the thrower? Play 4 catches most students, since a backward pass past the line is legal. **Bonus:** look for a specific rule and a clear reason.

B · Context Clue Words

1. Answer: **neutral zone**
2. Answer: **incomplete**
3. Answer: **turnover**
4. Answer: **mass formation**

Not used: touchback

C · Then & Now

1. Answer: **3 downs (para. 3)**
2. Answer: **5 points (para. 5)**
3. Answer: **the ball goes to the other team (para. 4)**

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