

The Superwhat?



The Super Bowl is the annual championship game of the National Football League in the United States and is largely baffling for the rest of us. We may have to learn, however, as American Football is working its way towards an Olympic showing.

The national Football League (NFL) was initiated in 1920 and successfully fended off several rival leagues, however, in 1960 the American Football League (AFL) was formed and became a serious competitor. The AFL went head to head with the NFL not only for players, but also fans, which led to strain on both sides. The Super Bowl was created as part of the resultant merger agreement. In the lead up to the merger between the two codes, it was agreed that the champions from the two leagues would compete. After the merger, The Super Bowl continued, with each league redesignated as a 'conference'. The Super Bowl is now played between the conference champions.

The game is held annually on a Sunday as the final game of the playoffs. It was originally held in early to mid January, following the fourteen-game regular season and two rounds of playoffs but over the years, the season has extended to sixteen games plus a bye week and three rounds of playoffs, postponing The Super Bowl to the first Sunday in February. 26 of the 46 Super Bowls have been played across just three cities; New Orleans, Miami and Los Angeles, with the former hosting the 47th championship early next year, followed by New Jersey the year after and Glendale, Arizona in 2015. No team has ever played the Super Bowl in its home stadium, although several have played in their home towns. This does

not automatically mean they are the home team, as this is determined by rota. The AFC team is the designated home team in even-numbered games and the NFC takes over for the odd-numbered games.

As with any large sporting event, the location is chosen well in advance, usually three to five years before the game. Cities bid and are evaluated on their stadium and their ability to host, although weather is also a factor. The NFL does not award the match to stadiums in climates with an expected average daily temperature less than 50°F (10°C) on game day, unless the field can be covered by with a retractable roof. For this reason, only four games have been held in northern cities. Contrary to these weather considerations, in 2007, the NFL Commissioner suggested a Super Bowl might be played in London at Wembley Stadium. While the Super Bowl has to date remained on US soil, a regular season NFL game has been played in London since 2007 and it has been confirmed that at least one game will be played at Wembley until 2016.

The Super Bowl is one of the biggest television money-makers of the year, with a massive US and global television viewership. In terms of Nielsen television ratings, on average, 80 to 90 million people from the United States are tuned into the Super Bowl at any given moment. The 2012 Super Bowl

holds the record, with over 111 million US viewers and an estimated total global audience of nearly 167 million, making the game the most-viewed television broadcast of any kind in American history. Naturally, this also makes it the most desirable in terms of advertising slots. Major brands often launch Super Bowl specific campaigns during the match, paying as much as \$3.5 million for a thirty second spot.

The half time show has also grown with the game. Early on, the show consisted of local college marching bands but with an increase in viewers came an increase in expectations, and soon popular music acts vied to perform. The first Super Bowl to have pared the half-time entertainment down to one star performer was the 1993 game featuring Michael Jackson. Acts such as U2, The Rolling Stones and The Black Eyed Peas have followed in these star-studded footsteps.

No talk of the half-time show would be complete without a mention of 'Nipplegate'. The wardrobe malfunction incident between Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake in 2004 generated significant controversy, a large number of complaints, and a backlash against Ms Jackson, while Justin Timberlake admitted he shouldered less than 10% of the blame. This year's Super Bowl entertainment again caused controversy with British rapper M.I.A. adding an extended middle finger to the performance of Madonna's new single, Give Me All Your Luvin. No doubt the organisers and 2013 sponsor, Pepsi, will be keen to avoid controversy at the next half-time show, which may give anticipated performers Britney Spears or Akon the edge over Lady Gaga.

Unusually, the annual Super Bowl is allocated a Roman numeral to identify each game, rather than the year in which it is held, so Super Bowl I was played in 1967 as the finale to the 1966 regular season, and the Super Bowl for





the 2012 season, to be played in 2013, is the Super Bowl XLVII.

If you are a first time viewer, there are a few basics that can help with an understanding of the game. Firstly, gridiron generally refers to the field in the American lexicon, as opposed to Australia where the sport itself is known as Gridiron to distinguish it from Australian Rules Football. The playing field is 100 yards long with stripes crossing at five-yard intervals. Shorter lines, called hash marks, mark each one-yard interval. On each end of the playing field is an end zone which extends ten yards and on the back line there is a goal post to mark the goal line.

Each team is allowed 11 players on the field at a time but unlimited substitution is permitted. The teams are comprised of offense, defense, and special teams, whose functions are what they say on the box. The special team is used if a kicking play is expected. The fundamental aim of the game is to score touchdowns. A coin toss decides which team will kick off the ball at the start of the game and they kick off towards their opponents. This is the point where chaos breaks loose, otherwise known as scrimmage. The receiving team has to catch the ball and try to advance it as far as possible. The play ends when the player

with the ball is tackled to the ground or successfully makes it to the end zone for a touchdown.

When a player with the ball is tackled to the ground, runs out of the boundaries of the field, or a forward pass hits the ground without being caught, this is called a down. In order to keep play moving, the offense must move at least ten yards towards the opponent's end zone within four downs. If they succeed, they are given a new set of downs, otherwise they cede possession. If a team advances the ball into the end zone, it is a touchdown. The team scores six points and a try, or conversion.

In a try, the same team attempts to score one or two additional points. For two points, the team will line up at the two-yard line and make an attempt to get the ball back to the end zone. For one point the team can attempt to kick the ball through the goal posts from the two-yard line. The only other way to score is if the player with the ball is tackled in his own end zone. In this case the defense scores a safety, worth two points. After scoring, play goes back

to the middle of the field where the scoring team kicks the ball off to their opponent, and play starts again.

American football is a growing sport that is fast moving forward. The International Federation of American Football was formed in 1998, the first step to Olympic inclusion. The governing body has now applied for recognition by the International Olympic Committee, which requires a sport to have at minimum of 50 federations, with at least one federation on each continent. There are now 64 American football federations worldwide. If recognition by the IOC comes, Olympic inclusion may not be a pipe dream. This may be some way off, and there are number of hurdles for American Football to jump but it is a distinct possibility. For now, however, the Super Bowl reigns supreme.

How to score:

Touchdown = 6 points
 Extra Point Conversion = 1 point
 Two-Point Conversion = 2 points
 Field Goal = 3 points
 Safety = 2 points

The 2013 Super Bowl will take place in New Orleans on 3rd February.
 For more information see www.nfl.com