

# NAILBITER FOOTBALL playing rules



**Nailbiter Football** is a unique simulation of the professional game. Instead of resolving a game through an extended play-by-play process, you will experience all the scoring, drama, tension, and heartbreak of an NFL contest through a series of game highlights and crucial turning points.

## A. Regular Game Play

1. Select two teams to play against each other and prepare the scoresheet. Choose which team will use the Ghost Coach system, and which team you yourself will helm. In every game, one team will be the FAVORED team, and the other will be the UNDERDOG.

In general, if a team had 2-4 wins during a standard 16 game NFL season than the other team, they are FAVORED. If the teams are evenly matched or within 1 game of each other, the home team is favored.

If one team is far superior to the other, with 5 or more victories during the standard 16 game season, they are said to be HEAVILY FAVORED and the other team is the HEAVY UNDERDOG. (Distinctions between *heavy* underdogs/favorites and *regular* underdogs/favorites come into play only on the Rare Play charts .)

2. Nailbiter Football is played through alternating possessions, as noted on the scoresheet. As each possession ends, you will cross out the possession on the scoresheet. You'll see that in the 1st quarter, the Coached team receives the kickoff, while in the 3rd quarter, the Ghost Coach receives the kickoff. Teams will have approximately the same number of possessions as they would during an actual NFL game. There is no need to keep track of clock time until the Two

## Minute Drill.

3. The ball is kicked off from the 30 yard line. Consult the Kickoff table and roll the dice, adding them, to find the result of the kickoff.

4. Adjust the receiving team's down and field position on the scoresheet (Example: RAMS 1st - 10 - own 34). Down, yards, to go, and field position will be kept track of in this way throughout the game.

5. Whenever a team takes over the ball **outside the defense's 30 yard line**, refer to the **Possession Launch** table for the initial results of the offense's drive. Instead of playing out a possession normally from 1st down as in other simulations, Nailbiter leaps forward to the most key play in the possession.

6. If the progression of the offense's drive ever puts them **at or inside the defense's 30 yard line**, you will play on using the regular Offensive Play Result tables---skip to rule 8. Deep in the defense's territory, Nailbiter demands more hands-on play-calling.

7. Let's say that the offense started their possession outside the defense's 30, as most possessions do. The offense now refers to the Possession Launch table and rolls the dice to set up the key play. The dice roll will tell the offense where they have advanced the ball to and what the new down situation is. Then it's time for the offense to line up for the **key play**.

The team with possession of the ball now uses the Offensive Play Result tables to execute plays from scrimmage until they get a first down. Once a first down is achieved, they flip back to the Possession Launch table and roll for a new key play. (EXCEPTION: If the progression of their drive ever puts them **at or inside the defense's 30 yard line**, play on using the Offensive Play Result tables---skip to rule 8.)

*Example 1: After a kickoff, the Rams have a first down and 10 at their own 35. Consulting the Possession Launch table, they roll the dice and combine them, with the black die showing a 2 and the white die showing a 3. On this table, dice are combined, not added, with the black die being read first. The result is 23: +4 yards, 3rd down and 6. On the scoresheet, note that the Rams now have a 3rd down and 6 from the 41. This upcoming play is said to be the **key play** of the drive. If you are coaching the Rams, you now choose a run or pass from the Offensive Play Results table and then roll the dice again (adding them this time) to see if the Rams can get a first down through passing or running. If the Rams are the Ghost Coach's team, a play is selected for them from the Ghost Coach Play Selection Chart instead of you choosing one for them.*

*Example 2: After a punt, the Rams have a first down and 10 at their own 16. Consulting the Possession Launch table, they roll the dice and combine them. Let's say the result is 53: +27 yards, 2nd down and 25. On the scoresheet, note that the Rams now have a 2nd down and 25 from their own 43. The Rams coach calls for a medium pass, rolls the dice, and comes up with a 5. The pass is caught for 14 yards and the receiver steps out of bounds. It's now 3rd and 11 from the Steelers' 43. Because a first down wasn't achieved, the Rams must call another play, trying to march forward to the first down marker. If they don't get a first down this time, it's 4th down and they can either go for it or punt. Whenever they do achieve a first down, it's time to go back to the Possession Launch table to see if they can continue getting good yards. (EXCEPTION: If the progression of their drive puts them **at or inside the defense's 30 yard line**, play on using the Offensive Play Result tables---skip to rule 8.)*

*Example 3: The Rams' key play is a 3rd down and 8 from their own 20 yard line. They attempt a Line Run which gains them 25 yards. It's now 1st down and 10 from their own 45. Because they're still outside the defense's 30, they now flip back to the Possession Launch table to see what the next key play of their drive is, marching down the field.*

8. If a team does manage to get the ball to or inside the defense's 30 yard line, they then drop the Possession Launch table **for the rest of their possession**, and instead the coach calls **all** plays from the runs and passes of the Offensive Play Results tables.

*Example 1:* The Rams have a first down and 10 at the Steelers' 46 yard line. Consulting the Possession Launch table, they roll the dice and combine them, with the black die showing 4 and the white die showing a 5. The result is 45: +19 yards, 2nd down and 10. On the scoresheet, note that the Rams now have a 2nd down and 10 from the Steelers' 27. Because the Rams have driven inside the Steelers' 30, they now run the rest of their drive by calling runs and passes from the Offensive Play Results tables. Do not again go back to the Possession Launch table. If they are the Ghost Coach's team, those plays are selected from the Ghost Coach Play Selection Table instead of the gameplayer choosing them for him.

*Example 2:* The Rams have a first down and 10 at the Steelers' 46 yard line. Consulting the Possession Launch table, they roll the dice and combine them, resulting in a 36. The result is +13 yards, 3rd down and 4. On the scoresheet, note that the Rams now have a 3rd down and 4 from the Steelers' 33. A short pass play gets them an 11 yard gain for a first down. Because the Rams have now driven inside the Steelers' 30, they will run the rest of their drive by calling runs and passes from the Offensive Play Results tables. If they are the Ghost Coach's team, those plays are selected from the Ghost Coach Play Selection Chart instead of the gameplayer choosing them for him.

9. If the result shown on the Possession Launch table puts a team into the defense's end zone, place the ball on the 10 yard line instead and give them a first and goal from the 10.

*Example 1:* The Rams have a first down and 10 at the Steelers' 32. Consulting the Possession Launch table, they roll the dice and combine them. The result is 11: +45 yards, 3rd down and 4. Because this places the ball inside the Steelers' end zone, give the Rams the ball instead on the 10, first and goal.

*Example 2:* The Rams have a first down and 10 at the Steelers' 17. Because they're inside the 30, they must call their own plays. They try a reverse, and it goes for 25 yards. That's a touchdown!!

10. If the result shown on the Possession Launch table puts a team into its own end zone, the result is a safety, the quarterback is sacked in the end zone, 2 points. They then kick a safety kick and the other team takes the ball.

11. Note that on the scoresheet, the word JOLT sometimes appears beside a team's possession notation. This means that this possession will *begin* not by referring to the Possession Launch table but to the **Jolt Possession Launch** table. When the word RARE appears, the possession will begin by referring to the **Rare Play** table. Prepare for a little more drama than usual!

12. If a kickoff or punt is returned for a TD, that counts as a full possession. If the offense recovers an onside kick, the receiving team sacrifices their possession. If a fumble or interception is returned for a TD---or if a fumble or interception return is fumbled right back to the other team---do not mark off any possessions on the scoresheet. It's just as if the offense's possession was never completed.

13. **GAMBLING:** The Coached team may gamble on possessions begun on the Possession Launch table if the coach feels a need to crank things up on defense. Before he rolls the dice, the Coached team may *subtract* any number of dice roll numbers to achieve this effect.

*Example:* The Steelers, down by 12 in the 4th quarter, want to shut down the Rams offense, so they announce they will subtract 10 dice numbers from their dice roll on the Possession Launch table. A 45 is rolled. This 45 is turned into a 31. If he had rolled a 14, it would have been turned into a 11.

The Ghost Coach does not ever gamble.

14. Play alternates in this manner. When the Ghost Coach surrenders the ball after their last possession of the 1st quarter, the quarter ends. Note that some quarters feature more possessions than others. The only time the actual game clock comes into play is during the Coached Team's Two Minute Drill (read on for rules concerning the drill).

15. Note that two point conversions are attempted with a separate table, not by calling a specific play.

16. **PLAY COUNTS:** This is going to be a real test of your coaching skills. When calling plays in Nailbiter Football, you will have to think harder on offense and defense to design a scheme which does not become too predictable. On the scoresheet, each offensive play has a number beside it; this is the maximum amount of that kind of play that the Coached Team may call during the game. If you exceed that amount, the Ghost Coach is said to have learned your scheme, and you must roll the dice *twice* whenever you call that play, using the less favorable result every time! The Coached team does *not* get a new set of plays in overtime, so watch out. Play calls do not count if the play is called dead before the snap due to a penalty. Also, play calls do not count unless they were specifically chosen from the Offensive Play Result tables (example: rare plays do not count).

Also on the scoresheet, note that the blitz and goal line defenses have the number 1 beside them. You must call for at least one blitz and one goal line defense by the 4th quarter Two Minute Drill. If you do not, the Ghost Coach is said to have learned your overly conservative scheme. The penalty for this is that if the Ghost Coach ever gets the ball back during the 4th quarter Two Minute Drill, their very first play goes for a **30 yard rushing gain!**

## **B. Play Table Results**

### *Possession Launch Table*

**CONSULT RARE PLAY TABLE:** Note the team's new field position and then go to the Rare Play Table to determine the result of their key play without calling a play. Note that there are two Rare Play tables, one for the favored team, one for the underdog.

**PLAY CLOCK TICKING DOWN:** There's trouble getting the play in from the sidelines or indecision on the quarterback's part. If the Coached team doesn't call a time out right now to regroup, he must roll the dice and let the dice choose a play for him on the Ghost Coach Play Selection chart. *This rule does not affect the Ghost Coach.*

**GHOST COACH SHOWS BLITZ:** The Ghost Coach *will* blitz on this key play. If the Coached team attempts a pass play, go directly to the Blitz Table for the result of the play. Running plays are done normally. Blitzes on passes will result in either sacks, interceptions, or larger than usual gains.

**INCHES TO GO:** The Coached team may call for a measurement whenever they have just inches to go for a first down. You must expend a time out to get the referees to bring in the chains. However, if you roll an 1 on a single die, a first down is ruled. Otherwise, you are still inches short of the first.

Note that some running plays show 'inches' results. This means that if a team needs only inches to go for a first down, they achieve it. 'Inches' results are not cumulative and do not mean a full yard was gained. For example, if the Steelers have a 3rd down and 1, and a Dive Play results in an 'inches' result, it is now 4th down and they still have inches to go. *The Ghost Coach never calls for a measurement.*

**LONG GAIN:** A player breaks it in the open field or catches a pass deep. Consult the Long Gains table for the yardage.

**NUMBERS IN PARENTHESES:** Here's an example of how the favored team has an edge over the underdog. If you roll the dice on the Possession Launch table and come up with a result followed by a number in parentheses, check the scoreboard. Based on the score, the dice roll is switched to the one shown in parentheses if it hurts the underdog or if it helps the favored team.

*Example:* The Rams have a 1st and 10 from the 50. They roll the dice and come up with a 55. Because they are the underdog, change this instead to a 14.

*Example:* The Steelers have a 1st and 10 from the 50. They roll the dice and come up with a 55. Keep the 55, because as the favored team, this helps them, rather than switching to a 14, which would hurt them.

### *Offensive Play tables*

**FLAG DOWN:** Consult the Penalty Table after the play to determine who the flag is against and what it's for.

**LONG GAIN:** Consult the Long Gain Table to determine the length of the gain.

**FUMBLE/INTERCEPTION:** Roll two dice when a fumble occurs and note on the play charts that the outcome of the dice roll determines who picks up the fumble. If the defense recovers a fumble or interception and doesn't just fall on the ball, consult the Fumble, Interception, and Block Returns table. Each pass play has an interception length noted at the bottom of the Passing Plays table if the length of the interception is not specifically noted on the charts.

**RUSH:** On a dice combination of 6 and 3, the primary receiver is COVERED. At this point, the Coached team must choose whether to force a throw to that receiver or merely throw the ball away and take an incomplete pass. If he chooses to force a throw, consult the Receiver Covered table. On a dice combination of 5 and 4, the quarterback is under PRESSURE. At this point the Coached team must choose whether to have his QB run the ball or merely throw the ball away and take an incomplete pass. If he chooses to run the ball, consult the Pressure/Quarterback Runs table. *The Ghost Coach always chooses to run for it when under pressure, always forces a throw when his receiver is covered.*

**SACK:** Each pass play has a Sack length noted at the bottom of the Passing Plays table if it is not specifically noted on the charts.

**C1/C2/C3 GAIN:** Each pass play has a C1/C2/C3 Gain length noted at the bottom of the Passing Plays table. These are mostly used when the pass is complete against a blitz.

### **C. The Two-Minute Drill**

1. Note that at the end of the 2nd, 4th, and overtime quarters, the Coached team gets the ball for a 2-minute drill. When they take possession of the ball for this final drive, consult the Time Regulations table for rules on how to proceed.

2. Never use the Possession Launch table to determine the result of possessions in the Two Minute drill. Play entirely using the Offensive Play Result tables. It's time to make some serious play calls.

3. In the last two minutes of the quarter, mark off time on the scoresheet. Note that different types of play results take different amounts of time off the clock.

#### **D. Coached Team Options**

GOAL LINE DEFENSE: The Coached team may stack his defensive line and play a Goal Line defense to stop the run. Certain play results will change on the Offensive Play tables when this defense is employed, and these changes are noted there.

BLITZ: Before the Ghost Coach determines his play, the Coached team may call for a blitz. On a passing play, go directly to the Blitz table and roll the dice. On a running play, note that the blitz will change certain run results.

A list of other Coached Team options, like fake kicks, trick plays, bombs, drawing the defense offside, spiking the ball, taking a safety, etcetera, are included on a separate chart.

#### **E. Ghost Coach Advantages**

1. The Ghost Coach is given some small advantages as noted on the playing charts to balance out the fact that many decisions are made for him. The Coached team is meant to make as few decisions as possible for the other team. However, certain situations arise that require the gameplayer to evaluate the Ghost Coach's situation and make calls for him. Rather than assume what the Ghost Coach wants, it's better to roll one die and calculate the odds of the Ghost Coach accepting or declining penalties, calling time outs to save clock time at the end of a half or overtime, spiking the ball or taking a knee, punting or kicking a field goal, punting or going for it on fourth down, going for two point conversions, etcetera. Sometimes choices for Ghost Coach will be obvious, such as having to call timeouts when trailing late in the 4th quarter, or accepting very advantageous penalties. No die roll is necessary here.

*Example 1: The Ghost-Coached Steelers, down by 14 in the beginning of the 4th quarter, have a 4th and 1 on the Rams' 24 yard line. Chances are most likely that they would go for the first down rather than try a long field goal, about 5 chances out of 6 on a single roll of a die. Perhaps if they were down by only 7, the chances of them going for it rather than kicking a field goal would be 4 out of 6 instead.*

2. Unless it's specifically called for on the play charts, the Ghost Coach never gambles on the Possession Launch table, attempts a fake punt or field goal, plays a Goal Line defense, takes a safety, calls for a measurement, tries a Quick Punt, lets a punt roll, or tries a pooch kick. Don't make these decisions for the Ghost Coach. They will sometimes naturally come about on the charts.

3. If the Ghost Coach only has one play left in the 4th quarter or overtime and absolutely needs a touchdown, do not use the Ghost Coach Play Selection table. Instead, pick a pass play that would, if completed, almost guarantee a touchdown. For example, with one play left in the 4th quarter, the Ghost Coach, down by 6 on the defense's 12 yard line, should call a Medium Pass. Beyond the defense's 50 yard line, call a Bomb. With one play left before halftime, use your best judgment as to what the Ghost Coach would do.

4. Special consideration should be given in determining whether the Ghost Coach would call time outs during the 2-Minute Drill in order to conserve time so as to get better field position if they get the ball back.

All other playing rules are covered on the various play charts. If a situation arises that is not addressed by the charts, use your best judgment as to how to resolve play.

## **F. Helping You Beat the Ghost Coach: Game Play Tips**

1. Be careful when gambling on defense! Note that going too far on the Possession Launch table can cause a drastic result. (Example: A team trying to shut down an opponent's offense announces that 15 numbers will be subtracted from the dice roll. A 22 is rolled. This becomes the lowest total possible, an 11, which results in a quick 45 yard drive!)
2. Note that the Dive Play gives you a slightly better percentage of getting that all-important one yard, but it can also result in a fumble. The QB Sneak is a safer bet if you just need inches. And the Draw Play, while not providing much yardage, also is a safe bet if you're afraid of fumbling the ball. On the Passing Play table, the Screen Pass is very safe if you're leery of a pickoff.
3. When your receiver is covered, a complete pass will result in a big gain, but the chance of an interception goes way up. Similarly, having your quarterback run for it when under pressure can force a fumble or a tough sack.
4. Be very careful during your 2-Minute Drill. Scoring too quickly leaves the door open for retaliation.
5. While playing a Goal Line defense against the Ghost Coach can stifle his running game, sometimes you might get burned big time if he calls for a pass. But while a 3rd or 4th down and 1 or 2 to go situation can prove just as hard for *you* to run the ball effectively, note that you as coach do *not* receive the advantage of shocking the Ghost Coach with a pass and getting any particular advantage. Chalk it up to the Ghost Coach's unusually keen defensive awareness.
6. Note that throwing a long pass on first down gives you a slight surprise factor and a longer gain on a certain dice roll.
7. Note on the Running Plays table that it's not so easy to run out the clock with 2 minutes or less left in the half or game by handing the football off again and again. The defense will be jacked up for it.
8. The Play Count rule is the most demanding aspect of the game for the coach. You may want to think twice before you call an obvious play in certain situations---how many of those plays do you have left? Will you have enough passing plays heading into the final Two Minute drill? If you mismanage your play counts, you're going to have some tough times late in the game. And it usually doesn't pay to play for a tie game---in overtime, you're not getting any extra plays to work with, and the Ghost Coach receives the ball first. But note that attempting a fake punt or field goal can reset your play counts. This could really help late in the game. Do you dare?
9. There will be lots of little decisions for the coach to make during the game to keep things interesting. Trying to field difficult punts, trying to return kicks rather than letting them roll, going for fakes, bringing in a backup quarterback, trying to strip a ball from a ball carrier's hands, calling for a video review of a close call....it's all designed to test you and put your team's destiny not with the dice but in your hands. If you find yourself winning a lot of games in Nailbiter Football, give yourself some credit. If you find yourself dropping a lot of close ones....well, the owner would like to have a word with you....

### **Why are some game elements pre-determined? Is this really realistic?**

Things like coin tosses to determine who kicks and receives, the number of each team's possessions, and lengths of interception throws are pre-determined to cut down on fairly meaningless dice rolling and keep the game moving at a rapid pace. Nailbiter is not a simulation meant to reproduce every single facet of a football game---just the most exciting ones.

### **There's a Goal Line Defense, so how come no Prevent defense?**

It's assumed that teams use a Prevent defense when it's appropriate, but because the Two- Minute Drill in Nailbiter Football is designed for maximum heart-pounding and thus gives the offense the advantage, this Prevent doesn't necessarily help much, just as in a lot of real NFL games. However, note that it is more difficult to complete a Long Pass during the Two Minute drill.

### **There seem to be a lot of big gains on the charts, bigger losses too, a few more fumbles than usual, longer returns....how come?**

Just for the thrill factor, baby. It takes about a half an hour to play a full game of Nailbiter. We'd like you to be jumping up and down on the sideline or holding your head in your hands for at least twenty of them.

### **DEFENSIVE STRUGGLES AND BAD WEATHER GAMES**

Two extra Possession Launch tables are included with the game. If you're in the mood for a far more defensively oriented game, use the DEFENSIVE STRUGGLE Possession Launch table. If you want to play a game in heavy snow, or driving rain, use the BAD WEATHER Possession Launch table.

Nailbiter Football was designed with the belief that as today's sophisticated computer simulations become more statistically accurate and graphically complex, sports board games can still be as compelling if they are simply more fun. This is done by providing as much drama and tests of quick thinking as can be built into a single game.

**Watch for Nailbiter Baseball, coming in 2004!**

<b>Nailbiter Football</b>	<b>designed by Soren Narnia</b>	<b>copyright 2004</b>
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**Questions? Comments? Or would you like to buy Nailbiter games? Send an e-mail to [sorennarnia@aol.com](mailto:sorennarnia@aol.com).**