



Football History Highlights

Category: Group Activity

Series: The NFL at a Glance (*Amazing NFL Stories: 12 Highlights from NFL History*)

Supplies

Multiple copies of *Amazing NFL Stories: 12 Highlights from NFL History*, access to Football history timeline: <http://www.profootballhof.com/football-history/history-of-football/>

Prep

Ask students to read *Amazing NFL Stories: 12 Highlights from NFL History* or read it together as a class. Skim through the Football history timeline, using the attached Timeline Summary to note the most important events.

Directions

Ask the students to summarize a few of the chapters of *Amazing NFL Stories*. Help them notice the kinds of stories the chapters tell (a first-time accomplishment, a change in how the game was played, a rival league, or an all-time record).

Split the students into six groups. Assign each group a date range:

- 1869 to 1919
- 1920 to 1939
- 1940 to 1959
- 1960 to 1979
- 1980 to 1999
- 2000 to present

(Note: On the Football History timeline, all events 1869 to 1939 are in the same category. Since that category is the longest, this activity splits it in half.)

Have each group read all the events in their date range on the Football History timeline, looking for the kinds of key events that are described in *Amazing NFL Stories*. Each group should choose 8 years from their date range that they feel included the most important events. They should write down each year, along with a summary (two or three sentences) of the events that make it important.

Evaluation

Did the students correctly identify the most important events in their assigned date range? Give them 1 point for identifying each event and 2 points for summarizing it objectively. RI 6.2

(Note: There may be more than 8 acceptable answers per date range, which is why the attached Timeline Summary includes 10 years per date range.)

Purpose

To help students determine the key ideas within a written text and practice writing objective summaries.



Football History Highlights

Timeline Summary

1869 to 1919

- **1876:** The Massasoit convention created the first rules for American football. Walter Camp also became involved in the sport. He was later called the father of American football.
- **1892:** William (Pudge) Heffelfinger was given \$500 to play a game for the Allegheny Athletic Association. This made him the first person paid to play football.
- **1893:** Pittsburg Athletic Club signed the first pro football contract. It was for one of their players, likely Grant Dibert, for one year.
- **1896:** The Allegheny Athletic Association formed the first completely professional football team. Their season was just two games long.
- **1897:** The Lathrobe Athletic Association football team played an entire season with only professionals. No one had done this before.
- **1899:** Chris O'Brien started the Morgan Athletic Club. This team still exists, but it is now called the Arizona Cardinals. It is the oldest continuing operation in professional football.
- **1902:** The first pro football league, called the National Football League, was formed. The first night football game was played on November 21. Syracuse AC won the first professional football World Series.
- **1904:** Charles Follis became the first known black pro football player. He played for the Shelby (Ohio) AC.
- **1906:** The forward pass was made legal. George Parratt threw the first completed pass in a pro football game to Dan Riley on October 27.
- **1913:** Jim Thorpe, a track star and football player who won two gold medals at the 1912 Olympics, played for the Pine Village Pros in Indiana.



Football History Highlights

Timeline Summary

1920 to 1939

- **1920:** Pro football had many problems: skyrocketing salaries, players frequently switching to whichever team would pay them most, and professional teams using players who were still in college. Leaders met to decide on standard rules and form a league called the American Professional Football Conference. Its name later changed to the American Professional Football Association (APFA).
- **1921:** APFA leaders met to write a constitution and bylaws. They also created membership criteria and issued standings so that there would be a clear league champion.
- **1922:** The American Professional Football Association changed its name to the National Football League. It included 18 teams.
- **1926:** C.C. Pyle couldn't get a higher salary for one of his players, so he tried to start a new league. It was called the American Football League, but it only lasted one season.
- **1927:** The NFL eliminated 12 teams that were not doing well and consolidated players into better teams. This helped shift the league's center from the Midwest (where it was formed) to the East.
- **1932:** The NFL began keeping official statistics. A playoff game was the first NFL game played indoors. However, NFL membership was at an all-time low of just eight teams.
- **1933:** The NFL changed several of its rules. Until now, professional football had been very similar to college football. The new rules changed this.
- **1944:** A game between the Bears and the Lions was the first NFL game to be broadcast nationally. NBC radio's Graham McNamee was the announcer.
- **1936:** For the first time, all the teams in the NFL played the same number of games. Another rival professional football league attempted to form, but it folded in 1937.
- **1939:** The New York Giants won the first Pro Bowl. This was a game played between the NFL champions and a team of professional all-stars. The Brooklyn Dodgers and Philadelphia Eagles played the first NFL game to be televised.



Football History Highlights

Timeline Summary

1940 to 1959

- **1940:** The NFL Championship Game on December 8 was the most decisive win in NFL history. The Bears defeated the Redskins 73-0. It was also the first championship broadcast on network radio, and it played on 120 stations.
- **1941:** The first official NFL Record Manual was published. New rules added playoffs and sudden-death overtime. In the first divisional playoff game, the Bears beat the Packers.
- **1943:** The NFL made wearing helmets mandatory. Sammy Baugh led the league in passing, punting, and interceptions.
- **1946:** The Rams moved to Los Angeles, and the NFL had national influence for the first time. Bill Dudley of the Steelers was named the league MVP—he led in rushing, interceptions, and punt returns. A rival league, the All-American Football Conference, began.
- **1948:** Fred Gehrke painted horns on the Los Angeles Rams' helmets. This was the first modern helmet emblem.
- **1950:** A rule change allowed unlimited free substitutions, creating a period of football known for two platoons and specialization. The Los Angeles Rams became the first NFL team to have all its games televised.
- **1951:** The NFL Championship Game was shown on television across the nation for the first time. The Rams defeated the Browns 24-17.
- **1956:** Grabbing an opponent's facemask (unless he was the ball carrier) was made illegal. CBS became the first network to broadcast NFL regular-season games across the country.
- **1958:** Jim Brown set a record with 1,527 yards rushing. He played for the Cleveland Browns.
- **1959:** Lamar Hunt founded a new professional football league, called the American Football League. It was the seventh league to have that name.



Football History Highlights

Timeline Summary

1960 to 1979

- **1961:** Williard Dewvall left the Bears to join the Oilers. This made him the first player to choose to move from one league to the other. The first Playoff Bowl was played between the second-place teams in each conference.
- **1963:** The Pro Football Hall of fame was dedicated at Canton, Ohio, where the league that became the NFL was formed. Its charter class had seventeen members.
- **1965:** In a survey, 41% of fans said professional football was their favorite sport, while only 38% chose baseball. This was the first time more people chose professional football.
- **1966:** The conflict between the AFL and the NFL was at its peak. After several meetings, the leagues agreed to merge. They kept separate schedules until 1969, but they played an annual AFL-NFL World Championship Game starting in 1967.
- **1967:** The Green Bay Packers (NFL) and the Kansas City Chiefs (AFL) played the first AFL-NFL World Championship Game. The Packers won. This was the first Super Bowl.
- **1971:** A game between Miami and Kansas City lasted 82 minutes and 40 seconds. It was the longest professional football game ever—a record that still stands today.
- **1974:** New rules added speed and action to games. Sudden-death overtime was added to regular and pre-season games, kickoffs moved to the 35-yard line, and blocking was limited.
- **1977:** More rules were changed to help make passing possible and to reduce injuries. It was now illegal for offensive linemen to hit opponents' heads, faces, or necks with their hands.
- **1978:** The Super Bowl was played inside for the first time. More than 102 million people watched it. This was more than had ever watched any kind of television show.
- **1979:** Pittsburgh was the first team to win 3 Super Bowls. New rules helped keep players safe. They banned blocking from below the waist and using damaged or altered equipment.



Football History Highlights

Timeline Summary

1980 to 1999

- **1980:** Pittsburg won Super Bowl XIV and became the first team to win four Super Bowls. The NFL also changed some rules to reduce contact to the head, neck, and face.
- **1983:** Super Bowl XVII was viewed in more than 40 million homes. It was the second-highest rated live TV program ever, contributing to the NFL sweep of the top 10 live programs.
- **1984:** Players set several all-time records. Dan Marion passed for 5,084 yards and 48 touchdowns; Eric Dickerson rushed 2,015 yards; and Art Monk caught 106 passes. Walter Payton broke Jim Brown's record by finishing the season with 13,309 career rushing yards.
- **1986:** Super Bowl XX replaced the last episode of M*A*S*H as the most-viewed TV program ever. More than 127 million people watched it. It was shown on TV in 59 foreign countries.
- **1990:** The NFL's total paid attendance was the highest ever: 17,665,671. The regular-season total paid attendance was also a record 13,959,896.
- **1991:** Super Bowl XXV was the first Super Bowl won by one point. More than 112 million people watched it in more than 60 countries. The NFL started an international division called the World League.
- **1995:** The NFL became the first major sports league to start a site on the Internet. The San Francisco 49ers won Super Bowl XXIX and became the first team to win 5 Super Bowls.
- **1996:** The total paid attendance for all 1995 games was 19,202,757. This was the first time attendance was over 19 million and the seventh year in a row that it reached a record level.
- **1998:** The Tennessee Oilers changed their name to the Tennessee Titans. The NFL retired the name "Oilers." No name had been retired before.
- **1999:** Once again, the paid attendance set a record at 19,741,493. The Frankfurt Galaxy became the first NFL Europe League team to win a second World Bowl.



Football History Highlights

Timeline Summary

2000 to Present

- **2000:** The Pro Football Hall of Fame hosted Pro Football's Greatest Reunion. More than 100 of the 136 members who were still living attended. Paid attendance for all games in a season topped 20 million for the first time.
- **2002:** The NFL season started on a Thursday night for the first time. The season's first week was the highest-scoring and most competitive Kickoff Weekend ever. Teams scored 788 points and 89 touchdowns.
- **2003:** NFL Network launched on November 4. It was the first television network dedicated to year-round, 24-hour coverage of the NFL and football.
- **2004:** Super Bowl XXXVIII set a new record as the most-watched US TV program. 144.4 million people watched it.
- **2005:** Hurricane Katrina caused the New York Giants vs. New Orleans Saints game to be moved to the Giants' stadium. Fans gave \$21 million to help the rebuilding effort.
- **2007:** African-Americans (the Colts' Tony Dungy and the Bears' Lovie Smith) coached both teams at Super Bowl XLI. Brett Favre became the NFL's all-time career leader, and Tom Brady set the single-season record with 50 touchdown passes. The New England Patriots scored a record 589 points and were the first team to finish the regular season 16-0.
- **2008:** An NFL game was broadcasted on NBC and streamed live on the Internet on NFL.com and NBCSports.com for the first time. Throughout the season, an average of 44.1 points were scored—the highest since 1970.
- **2009:** This season's home games were shown in their entirety (though with a delay) on NFL.com. This was a major change from the NFL's usual policy of blacking out home games.
- **2010:** The NFL changed several rules to increase player safety. It increased penalties for striking opponents' heads or necks. The NFL also teamed up with the CDC to create a poster warning young athletes about concussions.
- **2011:** Super Bowl XLV, viewed by 162.9 million people, was the most-watched US TV program ever. An all-time high of 11,356 points were scored this season. Aaron Rodgers' 122.5 passing rating led the league, and Drew Brees set a record by passing for 5,476 yards.